Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

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(and other questions about Jews and clothes...)

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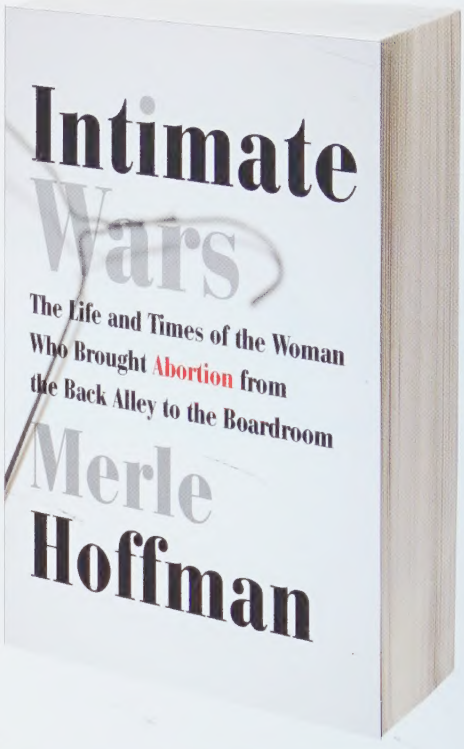

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hbi fp

Lilith

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*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**

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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."
—*Nessa Rapoport*

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Turns out that praising girls for being smart is *not* the way to raise them to be confident and competent. If you think that your ability to do a task is based on a fixed trait—like your intelligence—rather than on hard work, you'll accomplish less than if you'd been praised for persistence, according to research by Carol S. Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford.

We know enough by now, let's hope, not to praise little girls for being pretty, or for looking like a princess. But even when we think we're commenting, in a good way, on brains, not beauty, we risk doing unintended harm.

Dweck invites us to give accolades for "the process they engage in, not how smart they are or how good they are at it." Instead, give praise for "taking on difficulty, trying many different strategies, sticking to it and achieving over time."

Take math, for instance. "Of all the subjects on earth, people think math is the most fixed," Dweck has said. "It's a gift; you either have it or you don't." Girls, more than boys, believe that math abilities are innate and that they don't possess them, whereas boys simply assume that they *do* have this gift, and move confidently through any difficulties or confusion. Dweck subtitled her fascinating report on these findings "Beliefs That Put Females at Risk."

Praising girls for being smart is not the way to go.

With all the talk about the STEM opportunities that we all want to open up for girls and women, I've been remembering what steered me, and so many other females, away from science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

It is somehow unmanly—unmasculine—for boys to be genuinely poor math students. It bespeaks a flaw, a lapse. In fact, I was surprised to see a guy I know admit recently on Facebook that math was his weak suit. In contrast, it has been no sin for a woman to say that she can barely do simple calculations.

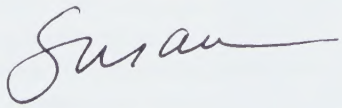
I picked up these gendered attitudes from a culture that showed me no role models of women solving quadratic equations. But I also learned them directly from my very own very accomplished mother, adept at many things—including visual and spatial tasks that, if any of us had thought to examine them, would have suggested she had the ability to calculate, compare, and so forth. Yet the consoling mantra she spoke frequently during my school years was, "It's okay. I was not good at math either, dear." Truth is, while I found geometry a breeze, and trigonometry a delight (go know), I despised mathematical activities that were more abstract. I didn't like subjects I couldn't grasp quickly. I abhorred algebra, and I found the math exercises that involved those conundrum-like upstream-downstream calculations particularly ghastly, the same way that later I was revolted by simple physics problems that involved a piece of lead embedded in a piece of cork. The same ways that pious Jews eschew the mixing of linen and wool, I found these unlikely yokings of materials to be unnatural. Same thing with figuring out the relative speeds of the canoes being paddled in two different directions. Ugh.

And in my family of origin, where Scrabble was the game of choice, it was almost acceptable for me to be a dull math student. It would clearly not have been okay to do poorly in other subjects. So, in junior high and high school, I worked (if at all) at the subjects that liked me, and managed to stifle my fear and loathing for my math courses just long enough to scrape through with passing grades.

Then, I was taken by surprise. In college, in order to take a thrilling, seldom-offered seminar in African drama, I was forced to make a scheduling trade-off. Forfeit the science-for-non-science-majors course and, instead, meet the requirement with a far more rigorous biology-for-pre-med-students course. The thrill of science snuck up on me. Our gifted professors included a woman who taught the emerging discoveries in her field with glee and excitement (and who, pregnant with her third child, brought her students donuts piled high in a baby carriage). Aside from my ineptitude in the lab sessions—I couldn't even figure out how to adjust my lab stool, never mind my microscope, for which my fellow students forgave me, since I lowered the curve—the expectation was that everyone, male and female alike, would absorb the material, which we did. I didn't have the feeling that a whole area of learning was off-limits to me because of some gender-linked lack of ability.

In this science course, mysteries were exciting and unknowns were codes to be cracked, not terrors to be avoided. Our professors expected us to succeed, not fail. And also missing was my mother's gentle and bemused voice, intended to be lovingly, reassuringly feminine, telling me that I was genetically programmed to be bad at math.

Granted, I never did take another math or science class, and the information I happily sopped up in college biology was put to later use largely to enrich my stockpile of available metaphors. But I've been thinking a lot lately about the ease with which, when I was a girl, I had been let off the hook for these subjects, in school and at home, because I lacked the "gift" to engage with them. (Anyone who wants to insert here the Jewish piece—extrapolating from math ability to girls' aspirations to read Torah, say—should feel welcome to do so.) Unless we praise girls for working hard at STEM subjects, or for taking on and performing rituals competently, we're colluding—inadvertently, but successfully—in driving them away.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

Better get my AR Wear on!
No girls on earth are hard-wired to prefer pastels.
The grim reaper and I know each other pretty well.
Dreaming is a form of planning.
It's a potent stimulus.
Intimacy, love, pleasure and holiness.

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

GoldieBlox and the Three Girls

For Hanukkah, my daughters (ages 6.5, 4.5 and 1.5) got a range of gifts that are great for girls. These include K'Nex (my older girls just built an amazing roller coaster), a remote controlled robot kit (my eldest attended vacation robot camp and filed the experience on her "Things That Are The Best Ever" list), Magnatiles and SnapCircuits.

This gift list did not include GoldieBlox, the much-hyped "engineering for girls" toy that hit the web with a sonic boom on Kickstarter last year, and upped its own ante with a commercial that has gone viral. It features three girls who overturn media assumptions about what girls like by building an extremely sophisticated Rube Goldberg machine using, among other things, a pink tea set.

I actually contributed to the Kickstarter campaign of inventor and engineer **Debbie Sterling** and bought the first GoldieBlox kit. However, I completely misunderstood the premise of this invention. I am entirely at fault for this misunderstanding, for I did not, at the time, read all the way down to the copy that reads as follows: "GoldieBlox goes beyond 'making it pink' to appeal to girls. I spent a year doing in-depth research into gender differences and child development to create the concept. My big 'aha'? Boys have strong spatial skills, which is why they love construction toys so much. Girls, on the other hand, have superior verbal skills. They love reading, stories, and characters."

This, in a word, is *narishkeit*. Kids of all genders love reading, stories, characters and building. No girls on earth are hardwired to prefer pastels.

While Debbie has tried to distance herself from this toy series, this is the same misguided premise that led to the creation and marketing of Lego Friends, a.k.a. Legos for Girls—a cutesy pastel version of Legos—as if the very awesomeness of Legos themselves were not enough for girls. As if without a verbal component, a pink component, or a princess component (GoldieBlox 2.0 features a story about a float in a princess parade), girls just won't get with the program.

My daughters aren't anomalies to their gender. They aren't geniuses (well, maybe a little). They aren't good at math or building because of some preternatural understanding of numbers or physics or because they have overcome a hardwired weakness endemic to girls' brains. They're just kids, and because they're kids, they are curious and they like stacking things on top of each other. Because they're my kids, their curiosity isn't boxed in to gender roles, and they know they can do anything or be anything. My husband and I have worked very hard to let our kids know that some of their strongest assets lie in their curiosity, their desires to explore, to try, to be willing to fail, and to try again. And building toys are perfect ways to learn these lessons and prove them true. And so, building toys for kids—not for girls—are the toys that they received, and loved, this Hanukkah.

ELIZABETH MANDEL in "GoldieBlox and the Three Girls," at the Lilith blog, December 2, 2013. More at *Lilith.org/blog*.

L: Purim 1952, Spector and a Yemenite couple; R: Spector and Indian delegates at the 1969 Annual Conference of the Music Academy of Madras, India.

She Saved Their Songs

Johanna L. Spector (1915–2008) was a renowned ethnomusicologist who captured the traditional cantillation and folk tunes of Jewish immigrant groups soon after they arrived in the newly formed State of Israel—before exposure to foreign melodies influenced each group's native music. Spector's papers, tapes and film footage, archived at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, are now being processed, and parts of the collection will be released starting this summer.

Born in Latvia, Spector became a scholar and professor of ethnomusicology at the Seminary, the first woman elevated to full professorial rank there; for many years she was the only female teacher on staff. A survivor of Nazi work camps, she immigrated to the U.S. in 1947 and pledged to use her musical training "to do something for the Jews." She was determined to build on the ground-breaking work of ethnomusicologist **Abraham Zevi Idelsohn**, who studied Jewish music from around the world.

Finishing a Ph.D in Jewish Studies in 1950, by 1951, Spector was a research fellow in Israel. She would head out at all hours, carrying her heavy equipment, to record music in synagogues and homes. A gregarious personality, she gained access to events and to people that would otherwise have been closed to a single woman. Her initial work in Israel put her in contact with the communities and music of Persians, Tunisians, Mesopotamians, Kurds, Urfalish, Syrians, Baghdadi, Moroccans, Yemenites, Ethiopians, Greeks, Azerbaijanians, Egyptians and Armenians. She also recorded Samaritans, a Jewish sect within Israel, and developed a life-long friendship with the High Priest of the Samaritan people. In 1962, while lecturing on her work, she also made connections which introduced her to Jewish communities in India, which later led to many more years of research.

In the late 1960s, Spector moved into documentary filmmaking. She made seven films, three of which won awards at major festivals. More information on Spector is available at *jtsspectorarchives.tumblr.com*.

MICHALA BIONDI

IMAGES FROM THE JOHANNA SPECTOR PAPERS, COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

On raising dual-faith children:

"My husband and I decided that we wanted them to feel that they could be at the center of an interfaith-families community, surrounded by other interfaith children, rather than trying to conform to a single religion in which they might, or might not, be accepted. And we wanted them to feel equally connected to both sides of their religious ancestry."

from "Being 'Partly Jewish'," by **Susan Katz Miller**, in the New York Times, October 31, 2013.

"A lot of times teens associate sex with every slang term in the book—all these degrading words. I try to impart that it's about intimacy, love, pleasure and holiness."

from "Women Sparking a Jewish Sex-Ed Revolution," by **Julie Wiener**, at *jta.org*, October 25, 2013.

JTA.ORG

What can we do to prevent sexual assaults?

Some people have got it right, and some people have it so wrong.

How to Stop Rape on Campus

In an open letter to President **Phil Hanlon** of Dartmouth University, mathematics professor **Alex Burnett** criticized the university's emphasis on "bystander intervention" to prevent sexual assault, and its handling (or, rather, not handling) of reports of rape within the university. The professor's fact-based advice:

- Hand suspected rapists over to the police, instead of, for example, advising rape victims to take medical leave. Burnett reminds Hanlon that evidence shows 94% of men do not rape, but that those who do are serial offenders. Unstopped, they will rape again. Therefore they must be evicted from campus and turned over to the police; actionable crimes of violence must not be treated as misunderstandings or youthful hijinks on par with underage drinking.
- Transition to co-ed housing, since gender- segregated spaces—like fraternities—are associated with higher rates of sexual assault.
- Empower women on campus by funding and supporting a Women's Center, and naming it thus—instead of the current blandly named Center for Gender & Student Engagement.

The professor concluded: "...that, as a wealthy private institution with student safety in mind, it is inconceivable that we don't have the power to fix some of the injustice of rape (and the related hazing) on our campus. If we somehow do not have this power (certain forces are opposed to change), naming and discussing these obstructions is essential."

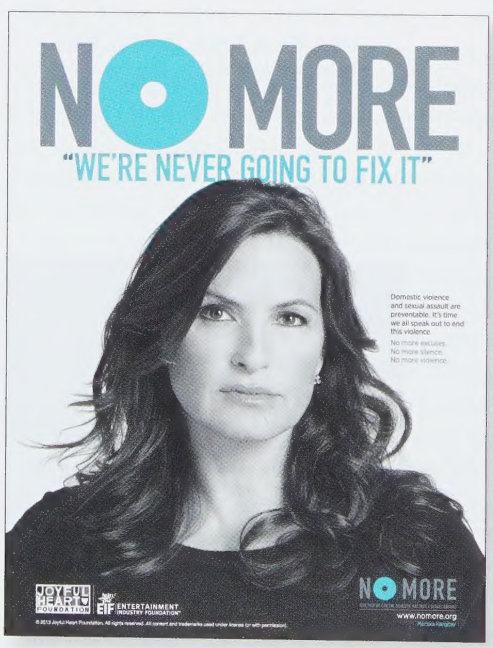
The professor's call to action is refreshing in a time when national statistics show that 1 in 4 female college students experience sexual assault by their graduation day, and there is little accountability or punishment for the perpetrators.

Anti-Rape Underwear? Seriously?

Some businesses are breaking into the industry of rape prevention. Now women can purchase Anti-Rape Underwear—AR Wear—for those situations that women feel might be dangerous, such as traveling, going for an early morning jog, going out at night. This technologically advanced undergarment is supposedly impossible to pull down, making it harder to accomplish what the AR-Wear website calls "complete rape." What this magical underwear fails to solve is the problem of why, in our society, is it perfectly normal for a woman to leave her home and say to herself, "I might get raped today. Better get my AR Wear on."

AR Wear comes with a disclaimer: "The only one responsible for a rape is the rapist and AR Wear will not solve the fundamental problem that rape exists in our world. Only by raising awareness and education, as well as bringing rapists to justice, can we all hope to eventually accomplish the goal of eliminating rape as a threat to both women and men." And yet, this underwear puts the burden of rape prevention on women. It's the same old story—"You shouldn't have worn a mini skirt. Moreover, most rapists are known and even closely connected to the victim. You can be violated in ways that don't involve your underwear. And some rapists threaten you further if you don't do what they want. In conclusion: capitalizing on the fear of sexual assault—not going to help destroy rape culture!

Mariska Hargitay, in a public service annoucement for a new campaign against domestic violence and sexual assault.


NO MORE
"WE'RE NEVER GOING TO FIX IT"
Domestic violence and sexual assault are preventable. It's time we all speak out to end this violence.
No more excuses.
No more silence.
No more violence.
JOYFUL HEART FOUNDATION
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY FOUNDATION
NO MORE
www.nomore.org

Why Police Rape Kits Fail to Convict

The problem of sexual assault is consistently examined from the wrong angle. And **Mariska Hargitay**'s Joyful Heart Foundation shows that sometimes it's not examined at all. Although rape kits are generally collected from victims who report the crime to law enforcement officials, these kits can be ignored for months or even years before they are tested, allowing many rapists to go undiscovered and unprosecuted.

Joyful Heart is determined to spread awareness about these crimes with their website, *EndtheBacklog.org*. In response to reports of hundreds of thousands of untested rape kits around the country, three states—Illinois, Texas, and Colorado—have passed legislation that compels law enforcement agencies to take an inventory of their untested kits and send them to crime labs. It's a big step towards identifying and prosecuting rapists. In order to address and prevent sexual crimes in the United States, it is first necessary to view rape as a crime worthy of investigation.

MIRIAM OLENICK

Nice news in New York! **Rabbi Cantor Angela W. Buchdahl** will soon become the new senior rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City. She was the first woman to be ordained as both a rabbi and cantor, the first Asian-American rabbi, and the first Asian-American cantor. She'll also be the first woman to be named senior rabbi at Central, one of the most prominent Reform congregations in the U.S.

"Not the tiniest piece of crap eluded her."

Philip Roth describing his New Yorker editor, **Veronica Geng**, from "The Book of Laughter," by Claudia Roth Pierpont in The New Yorker, October 7, 2013.

"Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning."

Gloria Steinem quoted at *makers.com*, Novemver 18, 2013.

The Reverse Midas Touch

I spent the first 25 years of my life pretty convinced I had the Sadim Touch. Made-up word, really. Just Midas backwards, because it felt like everything or everyone I touched got snuffed out. My aunt had an aneurysm in her sleep and died when I was 10. Less than a year later, my dad's lungs got clogged with cancer and gave out. That was followed swiftly by the death of another aunt, then a neighbor. Then my step-dad keeled over from a heart attack when he stepped off the morning train.

Though I wasn't that close with my step-dad, I think in some ways, his death sealed the deal for me. I was definitely cursed. Why else would everyone around me be dropping like flies?

It took about 10 years and thousands of dollars in therapy to dissect and disprove my Sadim Touch theory. A handful more deaths too—including my mother's, which ripped my world apart. I knew there was no way I ever intended to harm my mom, or anyone for that matter. Blaming myself was a torturous way of trying to distract myself from grief. And just like Midas's gift/curse, it never really worked.

Just a few weeks ago, I was in the waiting room of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. One of my best friends from childhood was going through chemo. And yet, when my sick friend came out with more bad news, I told her, "Look, the Grim Reaper and I know each other pretty well. But nothing is determined yet. We just don't know."

And then, I touched her. I rubbed her feet and kneaded her palms and I squeezed. Hard. Because I knew I couldn't kill her with my touch. Instead, I could comfort her while we were both here.

ABBY SHER'S full piece is at *modernloss.com*, November 14, 2013.

Modern Loss is the new project of Rebecca Soffer and Lilith contributor Gabrielle Birkner, a website where you can "share the unspeakably taboo, unbelievably hilarious, and unexpectedly beautiful terrain of navigating your life after a death."

40 Years of the Israel Women's Movement—New Measures of Change

I have just returned to the U.S. from Haifa, where I lived for 15 years. I was there to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Isha l'Isha*, today part of the Haifa Women's Coalition, and the 40th anniversary of the start of the women's movement in Haifa, which began in my living room.

Feminism is alive and well, not just in Haifa, but in Israeli politics more broadly. Women are at the head of two parties, 27 women are Members of Knesset (a record number, up from 8 when I was elected to the Knesset in the 1970s). All 27 are members of a newly created Women's Caucus, and all speak of themselves as feminists. And the new head of Bank Israel, the equivalent of the Federal Reserve, is, like her American counterpart, a woman.

There are more than 80 feminist organizations working to advance women's status all along the political spectrum, from the Orthodox right to the secular left and everywhere in between. Ministries have advisors on women's issues, the government supports facilities to aid survivors of violence against women, and a slew of laws have been passed guaranteeing equal pay for equal work. With the conviction and imprisonment of a former President of Israel for rape and sexual harassment, Israeli women have been empowered to stand up to perpetrators of sexual violence.

But there is also disheartening news: Despite these evident gains, women's status on a number of key indicators declined significantly or failed to rise between 2004 and 2011, according to a study published in October by the Van Leer Institute's Center for the Advancement of Women in the Public Sphere. The number of women in the workforce has increased slightly, but their income remains static at 62%–65% of men's earnings. There has been a notable rise in the incidence of domestic violence along with a rise in violence against women in general. While Van Leer's Gender Inequality Index is trending down for Jewish Israeli women, for Palestinian Israeli women, while the gaps are wider, the indexes are trending up. One bright note is that the number of girls completing high school is rising and is now greater (46%) than the number of boys (43%).

Clearly feminism, the women's movement and women's issues have won the PR battle begun 40 years ago, improving the lives of a growing number of women—mostly educated, mostly professional, and mostly Ashkenazi. But it has left the majority of Jewish women's lives untouched.

How can we understand the paradox between the evident public acceptance of the feminist perspective with the downward trends for Jewish Israeli women's status over the past decade? Israeli feminism faces unique challenges: politically powerful religious Orthodoxy, the increasing political influence of messianic nationalism, and militarism so embedded that it permeates all aspects of work, social, and family life.

One bit of data from the Van Leer study helps to explain the downward trends. Though feminism is finding acceptance in the public sphere, it has not yet entered the home, where traditional roles still dominate. The Van Leer study reports that though 20% of women said they worked part-time because of family obligations, fewer than 1% of men reported cutting their work hours for homemaking and childcare. Young women entering the military still often find themselves relegated to supporting roles—a dynamic which later emerges in family life as well.

It is a further paradox of current Israeli society that the feminist movement, along with the gay rights movement, is cresting at a time when the country is tilting politically toward the extreme right. While this observation surely deserves more than an endnote, a provocative flash of insight was provided me by a young woman who could be my granddaughter: "What we need," she said, "is a three-state solution: Israel, Palestine, and Tel Aviv."

MARCIA FREEDMAN

The unnamed woman pictured on this November 27, 2013 front page of New York Times (R) responds to the controversy surrounding this powerful photograph, taken by **Rina Castelnuovo**.

"When I first saw the photo I did not find it either provocative or inappropriate. I thought it was powerful and told my story—I am a proud, young Jewish woman who had breast cancer, and I have a scar that proves it. I am not ashamed or embarrassed by the scar. Most of my breast was not exposed and the small part that was does not make the picture 'cheap'. I think it's very artistic…

"In response to some readers' comment on the tattoo I have on my body, I come from a family of Holocaust survivors. When I was 17, I went with my high school on a trip to the concentration camps in Poland. It was a very emotional and difficult trip, and when I returned to Israel I was so proud that I am Jewish and Israeli that I wanted the whole world to know. I will never have to hide my religion or where I come from. That's when I made the tattoo of the Star of David. It was 10 years before my diagnosis of breast cancer."

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York T

VOL. CLXIII . . . No. 56,333 ©2013 The New York Times NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2013

A Tel Aviv woman, 28, who found a lump in her breast. Cancer-causing gene mutations are common among many Jews in Israel

Push to Test for Cancer Gene Sets Up a Dilemma in Israel

U.S. Sends Two B-52 Bombers Into Air Zone Claimed by Chin

Women of the Wall is serving as an inspiration for a new women's clothing line by fashion designer **Comme-Il-Faut**. Part of the collection is a t-shirt that says, in traditional Torah script,

"We lovingly give permission to one another"

—a reference to Women of the Wall's claim that the group does not need license from haredi rabbis to pray at the wall. Proceeds from the shirt's sales will go to the group.

from "Women of the Wall meet fashion runway," at *timesofisrael.com*, October 27, 2013

SOAPBOX

Will we take a *religious* position on equality?

I am a Conservative rabbi. But I have Conservative colleagues who wouldn't call me for an *aliyah* to the Torah because I am a woman. I say, this is an affront to my honor. But I risk being accused of "intolerance"—of the one who will not recognize me.

So, foregoing a ritual in order to coexist within a "pluralist" movement: what's the big deal? Well, it's true that "egalitarianism" is about such things as counting in a minyan, receiving aliyot, etc., but it's also about leadership—and rituals are not just honorifics, they are about who we are in the world.

The participants in a Torah service reenact receiving the Torah at Sinai, and share the role of Moses. Moses embodies the ethical and ritual model we collectively aspire to; to practice and teach the ethical and ritual law, to serve God, and model righteousness to others. The *bimah* is a microcosm of the world; what we do there tells what we believe. When women are on the bimah, it says that men and women are equal citizens; that our leadership, too, honors the Torah and the congregation.

Some frame egalitarianism as compassionate "inclusion" of those once relegated to the women's auxiliary. But that wasn't the impetus toward egalitarian practice. Rather, it was the same impulse that drove us into the streets, marching for the rights of workers, and for civil rights, and impelled us in every place and every time to establish rule of law and work for justice, above and beyond the requirements of our own laws. The revolutionary premise behind the Covenant and all its laws is that all human beings belong equally to God, their Creator. That was the lesson of our exodus from Egypt, and the premise behind the laws we received at Sinai. Everything, even ritual, ultimately is corollary to, and serves, that religious truth.

True, permission was sought from the *halakha* for women to be "granted" access to honor and responsibility—it being deemed that that form of human equality might not just be a fad—but it was still treated as if it were a personal choice one can dismiss or not, as one chooses. And this attitude yielded "pluralism," a divergent stance, within one movement—on an issue of human equality.

But one cannot actually "permit" that which one has no authority to deny. Equality is recognized, not granted; one doesn't ask permission for that which is inherent; one stands up and calls for the imperative: that equal citizenship be honored, whether for ourselves or on behalf of others. If one woman is a full citizen in *Am Yisrael*, we all are—and always were, and our recognition is an obligation, not an option.

Conservative Judaism holds that halakha is not a box of sacred laws, but a sacred living system mediating our evolution, bringing us closer, and the world closer, to what God intends. We balance the particulars of being covenanted, with the needs of the world. There are things we bring *to* a living legal system—the facts on the ground, and our own understanding of the context. In this case, that is the evidence that men and women are equal, that women are free Israelites (not pre-empted by men from service to God), and that all free Israelites are equal in responsibility and honor.

The issue isn't tolerance of those who believe differently, but that we haven't taken a stand as to what Conservative Judaism holds, on a fundamental principle. And this condition is untenable both for us, and for seekers, who cannot see where our high ground is. Jews who do understand equality as a religious imperative note that our "permitting" equality undercuts our moral authority and our credibility from the left side. And we shouldn't pretend to Orthodoxy's form of "working within the system:" their view of halakha espouses the eternal sanctity and wisdom of laws we consider self-evidently (and halakhically) unjust.

Moses' job was not a man's job, though he was a man. "Rabbi" is not a man's job, though all rabbis once were men. And equality is the most "traditional" value of them all.

RABBI CHANA THOMPSON SHOR

Continued

"Fun Home" and the Continuity of Alienation

I took off 18 months between high school and college. I spent the first year studying philosophy in a French high school and falling in love for the first time. When I came home, I got reconstructive knee surgery, worked in a store selling computers, and made frequent trips to visit my friend at Brown, with boxes of dense homemade cookies that she still mocks. Not having made it to college yet myself, I was living vicariously through her, and I was itching to start my own journey.

I had no idea what lay ahead; I barely knew what I wanted to study, let alone who I wanted to become. I had no idea that my first roommate would have multiple personalities, or that my next roommate would wear fur coats to class and maneuver other white students out of the anti-Apartheid campaign in hopes that she could shine. I had no idea there were so many ways to be Jewish, or that I would gaze at Mare, a beautiful long-haired butch who sat on the quad with the other lesbians, and try desperately to screw up my courage to talk to her.

And I certainly had no idea that 30 years later I would sit in the Public Theater during the new musical "Fun Home," book and lyrics by Lisa Kron, music by Jeanine Tesori, and based on the graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel, and watch the lead character, "Medium Alison," navigate some of the same waters as I had—coming out to herself, to her new friends, and finally to her family.

Alison (and the Alison I refer to here is the Alison of the stage—not of the book, and not of the flesh and pen) had a cultural heritage that she couldn't quite grasp. She grew up in a gay culture, even less articulated than the Jewish culture of my own youth. Her father was a deeply closeted gay man who, like the Spanish crypto-Jews following the 1492 Expulsion, practiced the rituals of his gay identity while publicly adhering to heterosexuality. He preened, he decorated, he gardened, and he coveted his young male students, but he stayed married to his wife. And until Alison came out to him as a lesbian, he did nothing to acknowledge or pave the way for the life she was obviously crashing towards.

Except, in a way, he did.

We talk about Jewish continuity. We talk about LGBTQ continuity. We talk about passing along our cultures and our connections to the next generation. But we don't talk as much about passing along our alienations—that, in fact, alienation can itself be a cultural experience shared between parents and children. As I watched "Fun Home," I realized that Bechdel had written a book about the way she grew up as an alienated lesbian. But it took Lisa Kron to dramatize the way that *I* grew up—as an alienated Jew.

I knew I was a feminist before I got to college, and thanks to my feminist parents, along with literature, music, theory, and the campus women's group, I had no shortage of feminist context and discourse. But while I knew I was Jewish, I barely had language for this. In hindsight, I can say that I came from a Jewish secular home, one generation away from Orthodoxy on my mother's side, and one generation away from *klezmorim* on my father's. But at the time, all I knew was that we were atheists, linked our Jewishishness to our progressive social views, and that my mother fought with her mother in Yiddish. I felt different from the other Jewish feminists I found in college, who came from the private schools of New York City, their banter peppered with Upper East Side Hebrew.

It's not that I wanted what they had, but I felt left out of it, whatever *it* was. The only Jews I knew when I was young were in my own family. Later when other Jewish families arrived in my little Massachusetts town, I didn't realize. Everyone else probably did, but I didn't know the clues. A certain last name, a certain look—this all went right past me. I grew up feeling *other*, while also fairly well-liked and socially active. It never dawned on me to wonder if my certain last name and my certain look had anything to do with my sense of alienation. Or, more to the point, if the alienation I felt was exactly how my parents had *taught* me to feel—Jewish continuity in the form of never being quite sure if people truly wanted me around.

It took my moving to Portland, Oregon, after college for me to finally experience being a Jew in a culture of belonging rather than alienation. I arrived just after an Ethiopian student named Mulugeta Seraw was murdered by neo-Nazi skinheads. I became active in the anti-racist and anti-fascist movements that were galvanized by the attack, including the organization New Jewish Agenda, which became my first meaningful Jewish home.

But it's not like a switch flipped, and I suddenly knew how to be a Jew who belongs. I went to *shabes* dinners where people sang blessings over candles, wine and bread. How did they know the words and melodies?

I went to shul, but in a comedy of manners got it wrong again and again. I had asked a friend what to wear, and she said it could be extremely casual. I showed up in my sweats on Friday night after shooting hoops, and everyone else was wearing skirts and suits. One Saturday morning I dressed up—to find everyone else in their *zhlubby* weekend clothes.

I started learning Yiddish (which turned out to be my second enduring place of Jewish belonging). My summer course teacher mentioned that she would not be teaching on tishe b'ov. I had only just mastered my alef beys, and I definitely did not know what *tishe b'ov* was. "*Dos iz epes a simkhe*?" I asked. *Is it some kind of a party?* The teacher exploded in anger. How could I not know *tishe b'ov*? By the end of the class, I still didn't know what it was. (It's a day that commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temple in Jerusalem. It's not a party. You fast.)

I grew accustomed to (and maybe even comforted by?) these bewilderments, embarrassments, and humiliations in Jewish settings. Watching Lisa Kron's "Fun Home" made me realize that I had been groomed for exactly these alienated Jewish experiences.

As was Alison groomed for an alienated lesbian experience. From a young age, Alison knew she didn't want to wear the girly clothes her father picked out for her. She knew she didn't want to sweep her bangs back with a barrette. She knew her world cracked open with possibility when a butch delivery woman sauntered into the diner where she and her dad were eating lunch—a scene which Kron brought to life with the most authentic and delicate ode to butches the world has probably ever heard ("Ring of Keys").

Alison's father was there for all these formative moments. Yet rather than give her context for her feelings, he chose to groom her for her own closeted life. Because, really, what other kind of experience did he know how to pass along? His gayness was the stuff of sublimation, redirection and shame.

How did Lisa Kron do it? Did she purposely draw the parallels between queer and Jewish continuity? Did she allow her Jewish knowledge, experience, and sensibilities to infuse the queer story? Did she write the perfect show that allows everyone to see her own experience reflected? How closely did she track the ways that fear caused by homophobia does and does not mirror fear caused by anti-Semitism? I suspect it was a combination of all of the above—preening, grooming, and tending to every detail of her creation, and then making magic with a perfect decorating touch.

JENNY LEVISON

MAGUS JOAN MARCUS

On the appointment of **Janet Yellen** as head of the Federal Reserve:

Tonight, I feel reassured that my daughter's economic future is in good hands. I also plan to tell her that she, too, can grow up to become the most powerful economist in the world. It's a potent stimulus.

from "Why I'm Very Happy About Janet Yellen," by Justin Wolfers, at *bloomberg.com*, Oct 8, 2013

On being asked to write for no pay:

I think of it as a relentlessly forward-moving but regressively old-style economics in which certain categories of labor are deemed "emotional" or "women's work" or "housework" or to be done simply "for the love of it." That's the only logic to the otherwise absurd equation that it is "whorish" to demand to be paid for your work.

from "Writing as Woman's Work," by Patricia J. Williams, at *thenation.com*, October 30, 2013

On the absence of women in the Israeli tech industry:

"[Israeli] men will not be shy to pick up the phone. Men will feel obligated to help one another—and it starts in the army. Women in general don't have this network. And this is a network of getting jobs."

from "The Women of Startup Nation," by Simone Wilson, at *jewishjournal.com*, October 16, 2013

The Politics of Paradox

Some of our most Jewish acts are driven by paradox. Here, three fascinating and very different angles on some unexpected twists of Jewish identity.

***Holly Shulman**, daughter of an unheralded white civil rights pioneer, investigates the occluded Jewish core that drove her religion-hating mother to make her bold and risky treks into Mississippi. **Rachel Kadish** reveals how her annual bacon sandwich honors the legacy of her Holocaust-survivor grandparents. And **Karen Engel** reports from Austria on the resurgence of a nationalistic outfit—the dirndl—that Jews used to be forbidden to wear; now, do Jewish teen girls in Europe love it?*

WOMEN WHO WERE PART OF WIMS TEAMS GOING SOUTH IN 1964

Wednesdays in Mississippi

How Jewish Was My Mother's Civil Rights Activism?

by HOLLY COWAN SHULMAN

In that watershed year of "Freedom Summer"—1964—the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) invented a women's social-change project to support the civil rights movement; they named it Wednesdays in Mississippi. The project's middle-class organizers were all women; the staff was all female, and so were the participants. Week after week, for two summers, interracial and interfaith teams of Northern women flew into Jackson, Mississippi. My mother, Polly Spiegel Cowan—white, Jewish, a Northerner and a member of the National Council of Negro Women—was one of the creators of this unprecedented exercise in boundary-crossing.

The women would arrive in Jackson on a Tuesday and fan out across the state, to towns like Canton and Vicksburg, and fly home from Jackson on a Thursday. On Wednesdays, these women met—often in secret—with civil rights activists and African-American professional women across Mississippi. In Meridian, for example, they learned first-hand about race and education from Jennie Ruth Crump, the principal of the all-black grade school in the state's first brick school building for African-American children. It had been built in 1894 and named in honor of Rabbi Abraham Wechsler, who led the effort to build the school.

The mission of Wednesdays in Mississippi (sometimes known by its initials WIMS) was to use the resources of middle-aged and middle-class Northern women to build bridges of understanding between African-American and white women, develop connections with women of the South and to support these Southern women, whom they saw as the "shock absorbers of change." In 1964, this mission could mean facing danger, as one WIMS woman learned when, while making a call from a public phone booth,

she turned around to see a lit, sputtering bomb rolling straight at her. The process was not easy that first summer, especially for Mississippi white women who often could not bring themselves to invite white WIMS women into their homes, even behind tightly drawn curtains. Black Northern women found an easier welcome among their Southern counterparts. Because a number of them were engaged in all-Black businesses, they were not so susceptible to white economic threats. All were professional women: schoolteachers, business owners, nurses, librarians.

And because of the danger to all the women involved, WIMS "quarantined" (we might say embargoed) any news of their activities that fraught summer. They wanted no photographs, and no news was to be reported in the press—Northern or Southern. The embargo may be one reason this story was late to emerge. Another—more powerful—silencing was that most civil rights historians believed that WIMS was not radical enough to be worthy of the attention. The women were too middle-class, too middle-aged.... Now, with a new book and a film on the horizon, we can see how subversive WIMS really was, though not all subversion wears the same clothes.

The creators and leaders of Wednesdays in Mississippi were my mother and Dorothy Height. Height was the national president of the NCNW and guiding spirit behind all of its work. My mother was a former radio and television producer, a community activist, and the project's volunteer executive director. The two women worked with each other seamlessly and conferred with each other constantly, sharing their dreams and plotting their course. But their roots were very different. Dorothy Height (whom we Cowan children called by her first name at home, but whom we always addressed as Miss Height in public) was an African-American Christian who had dedicated her life to racial, social, and economic justice, to the "job of making [America] a place where everyone is not only protected, but has the full rights to justice and the pursuit of happiness we hold so dear." In contrast, my mother was less certain about her own motives: "What was there in my life's experience," she later asked in her unpublished memoir, "that led me to the Black Movement with an emphasis on work in the South?"

I've been trying to explore this question for years. What made a Jewish woman like Polly Cowan "work," as she later wrote, "23 hours a day ... [When] in no other movement and at no other time of my life have I dared the things I did between 1963 and 1968?" What was the wellspring of her social activism? And does the outline of her life mesh with the larger history of Jewish women of her era and age, women who were born in the first quarter of the 20th century, came of age during the second quarter, and participated in the movement for civil rights in the third?

For me, this question is intensely personal. Many years after my mother died, Dorothy Height told me that she'd had a repeated conversation with my mother in which she asked my mother if her commitment to civil rights was rooted in her religious beliefs. Height's faith was core to her actions. My mother, however, considered religion a cause of war and a curse to mankind. Height could never understand my mother's insistence that she herself lacked any religious sensibility, but instead harbored deep skepticism and distaste for any formal religious structure. Yet here I am, nearly a half century later, revisiting Dorothy Height's probing question.

Height and Cowan met during the summer of 1963. Civil disobedience in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi had escalated, and white segregationists were retaliating with brazen acts of violence. Brutality abounded. Women and children were being beaten and thrown in jail. The national leaders of the major civil rights organizations met to exchange ideas and broaden their search for financial support when a white philanthropist, Stephen Currier, decided to help. In June of 1963, Currier invited a number of wealthy white New Yorkers to meet for a breakfast at the Carlyle Hotel—and reach into their pockets for civil rights. My parents attended the meeting, and my mother was so stirred she started writing position papers about what she thought could be done. When Currier asked the civil rights leaders if any of them wanted a volunteer, all the men said no, but Height said yes, "if it is the one who's writing those papers."

That fall, after the historic March on Washington, and after Height had fought fruitlessly to include women among the civil rights leaders who appeared on the podium that day, a veteran Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee worker phoned Height from Selma, Alabama. Conditions were terrible, Prathia Hall reported. Hall needed help. Height and my mother decided to go to Selma themselves. While there, my mother got caught up in the excitement and momentum of a civil rights meeting and agreed to speak from the podium. Thereafter, no one in the Selma white community dared talk to her. The trip a failure, it taught my mother a quick lesson in Southern mores; if you wanted to build bridges to white, liberal middle-aged Southern women, you had to tread lightly.

Soon after that my mother came up with the idea that interracial and interfaith groups of high-powered women could go south. Height talked to her YWCA colleagues, and pulled in three other religion-based groups, including the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). With a base of five women's organizations, they began to move. They decided to focus on the problems of Mississippi. They all knew that Bob Moses—with the Council of Federated Organizations—was bringing college students from all over the United States to go to Mississippi the summer of 1964 to breach the walls of Jim Crow. This was "Freedom Summer," the genesis of Wednesdays in Mississippi.

Wednesdays in Mississippi was a unique civil rights program. Looking at civil rights through the lens of women, it focused on poverty, literacy, women, and children. The WIMS women were a generation older than the men and women

who flocked to Freedom Summer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and they were committed to a model that was both interfaith and interregional. WIMS was always about black liberation as part of human liberation, and justice for African Americans as part of justice for all people—everywhere in the world. Wednesdays in Mississippi was going to be their road to freedom.

Polly Spiegel Cowan—a white, Jewish, privileged Northerner—was a member of the national Council of Negro Women. Why?

From left: Fannie Lou Hamer, Dorothy Height and Polly Cowan

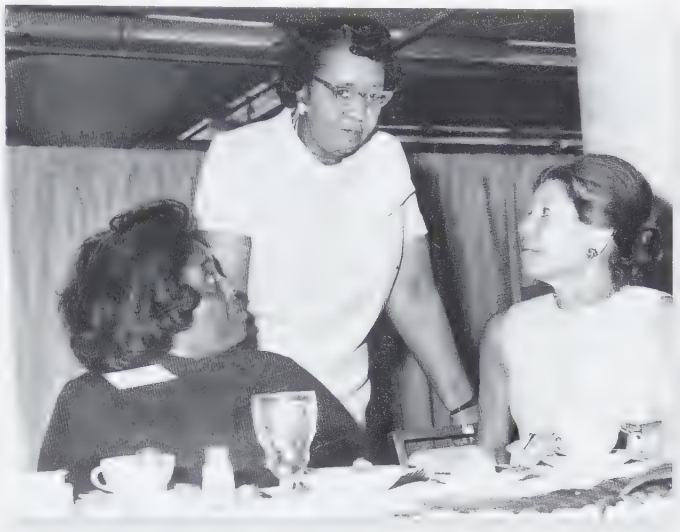


PHOTO HERE AND ON P.13: NATIONAL PARK SERVICES; MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE COUNCIL HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE; DC WAMMB; NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOR BLACK WOMEN'S HISTORY PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Polly Spiegel Cowan was born in 1913. The Spiegels had emigrated from Germany sometime around 1850 and made their way to Chicago, where they became wealthy merchants. My mother's parents moved to Kenilworth, Illinois, where she grew up in a very beautiful, very wealthy, and entirely Christian enclave. At school she had no Jewish friends. As a teenager in the 1920s this meant that she played sports with all the other girls, studied with them, and went to their houses for dinner and sleepovers, but was never invited to their parties and dances. Her parents, aware of this situation or not, were themselves deeply ambivalent about their own relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community. They sought spiritual meaning in their lives, I'm told, but could not find it in the Reform temples of their community. They would not have dreamed of searching for it among Conservative or Orthodox Jews, whose rites and rituals, language and sounds, food and dress, were utterly alien to them. They turned instead to Christian Science to satisfy their longing for some transcendent meaning. Despite this, all of their friends were Jewish. And my grandfather founded the local Jewish country club, which became the family's real temple and community.

My grandmother Lena sent my mother off to Sarah Lawrence College, where she encountered the New Deal New York of the 1930s. An anti-fascist from 1936 onward, Polly was a member of the generation raised on the ideals of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and Eleanor Roosevelt's progressivism. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago she began fundraising for anti-Nazi rescue committees.

My mother married Lou Cowan, my father, in 1939. They moved to New York during World War II, and in 1952 my father headed up Adlai Stevenson's media campaign while my mother took charge of women volunteers for Stevenson. When my father was offered a job at CBS, first as vice-president for creative affairs and then to head the New York flagship station WCBS, he took it, and sold his own media company. My father's decision required my mother to reinvent herself. She had to leave her own position as a media producer to avoid a potential conflict of interest, and this required her to shift her professional focus. She shopped around for a new life. Eventually she volunteered for the Citizens Committee for Children, and from there moved to the National Council of Negro Women.

My parents had long been involved somewhat peripherally in civil rights. By 1954, my mother had become a board member of Wiltwyck, the first racially integrated reform school for boys, and a pet project of Eleanor Roosevelt's. My parents sent me and my siblings to a Manhattan private school, Dalton, that was racially integrated by the 1940s. As my parents made friends among the school parents, my mother came to realize that "even the most privileged Negroes suffered from discrimination: in housing, in education, job opportunities, political offices, cultural advantages."

In an unpublished autobiography, my mother explored the roots of her commitment to racial justice. She made many revisions to this memoir, and as I read modification after modification, I saw that the more she wrote, the more her identity as an American Jew surfaced. At first she rarely mentions it; by the end it holds the center of the narrative. For her, being Jewish is always about persecution: being left out of the social life of her high school years, raising money for Jewish refugees, signing affidavits to get Jews out of Germany, discovering housing discrimination in New York.

My mother drew on her Jewish past to explain her commitment to civil rights and racial justice. She also believed that there are moments in history that compel you to act. For my mother, the civil rights movement was such a moment; it opened a door for her to act directly, beyond the dinner parties or friendships, petition-signing and charity.

My mother hated religion, but Dorothy Height argued that only a religious belief could have led my mother down this path.

Polly Spiegal Cowan and Dorothy Height, Co-founders of WIMS

My mother became a teenager and young adult after the great Jewish immigration to America. While a member of a Midwestern, wealthy, German community, she would have shared in the growing sense of being an American, rather than a hyphenated ethnic. Her instincts were liberal, as were those of the majority of Jews of her generation. She talked with her peers about the growth of fascism in Europe, and sympathized with the increasingly weak Republican forces in Spain. Being Jewish felt central to this work. For my parents World War II was fought not simply to defeat the Axis, but to defend the Jews.

When my parents moved to New York City in 1942 they still feared the anti-Jewish attitudes of their neighbors in the German section of Yorkville. For my mother, the New Deal was important in part because the Roosevelts seemed to be the defenders of the Jews. Federal agencies hired Jews who were unacceptable to traditional law or accounting firms.

My parents never talked about living in a Jewish enclave, and indeed during these years of assimilation they strove to widen the boundaries of their world to include non-Jews. But they always lived their lives, at least as a family and as a couple, in a predominantly Jewish world. This Jewishness was hidden under a secular blanket; we celebrated Christmas and hunted for eggs on Easter, and never, ever had a Passover seder. Yet there must have been a deeper Jewish current running through our household, as my brother Paul Cowan went on to write about recovering his Jewish past, my sister-in-law Rachel Cowan became the first woman convert and rabbi in America, and my own son is now the Orthodox rabbi at the University of Pennsylvania.

In the argument between Dorothy Height and Polly Cowan over whether my mother's actions had any religious wellspring, who was right? Height, in her belief that only a religious commitment could have led my mother down the path she had taken, or my mother, who remained anti-religious to the day she died?

Here is my answer. My mother's response was both right and wrong. She correctly replied that, for her, the strength of her belief in social and racial justice was not rooted in a belief in God or in any spiritual belief system of the kind Height implied. She did hate religion and she and my father raised us as entirely secular Jews. By the 1950s she understood that Jews had at least partially integrated into the nation, in a way that African Americans had not yet been able to do.

My mother's world was defined by Eleanor Roosevelt's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and infiltrated by the fears of the Cold War. In the 1960s both of my brothers joined the civil rights movement and went to Mississippi; they also both traveled in Israel, one spending a summer on a kibbutz, the other taking a semester off from college to work with poor immigrant Jews in Beersheba. And my mother, like so many of her peers, believed that women could best act through women's voluntary organizations. They were the daughters of the Progressive Movement.

In the decade following the end of World War II, many Reform and Conservative Jews believed that the way to practice their Judaism was through social justice. As Jews became more accepted in the U.S. the practice of Judaism generated for many a religious duty to extend social action toward African Americans. In this regard, my mother's work with Dorothy Height was connected to the impulses of other Jews.

This era of universalism ended in the late 1960s, perhaps because of Jewish pride in the wake of the Six Day War, or perhaps because—as I remember from my own experience—the rise of Black Power, a movement which deliberately excluded most whites. But Dorothy Height adhered to her vision of integration and human rights, and my mother remained by her side, until my parents died, in a fire in their home in November, 1976.

As Polly wrote in the 1970s, her experiences as a Jew—facing exclusion and horrified by destruction—created in her such a deep antipathy toward oppression that she was spurred to act. Her Jewish identity made her civil rights work a logical and heartfelt consequence. ■

Holly Cowan Shulman is a historian at the University of Virginia, where she edits the papers of Dolley Madison.

In production is a documentary film about Wednesdays in Mississippi. Learn more at wimsfilmproject.com. For more details on Wednesdays in Mississippi, visit http://www.history.uh.edu/cph/WIMS.

MY GRANDFATHER CHANGES HIS LAST NAME

At the Grand Canyon Red Rock Motel
he signs the register. The shiny Buick out front
my grandmother holding the picnic basket
boiled chicken, she glances at the paper,
the familiar handwriting, the blue ink.
"Mr. and Mrs. Taylor! Am I some floozie?
You have to write a different name? Taylor?"
She tells the clerk, "We are married forty years."
Grandpa says nothing, steps out for the valise.
Polished shoes, a tuft of thin blond hair
slicked back under the Panama hat,
his purple shirt looks like an orchid
in the Arizona heat.

In the hot motel room, they sit on twin beds.
Whir of the fan the only sound. She unpins
her long hair. "One of your practical jokes?"
My grandfather, the lawyer, says,
"Taylor is now our legal name."
She sighs, thinking about engraved flatware,
cloth napkins, tea towels, the Hs she sewed
on percale sheets and pillowcases.
"I've been Mrs. Herman since I was a girl.
What about your brothers and sister?
Who goes and changes his own family name?"
His jacket and tie still on, he sits stiffly.
She is already down to her pink corset.

"Meshugener," she mutters.
She has never called him a name
directly before. Plenty, "Blitz Krieg,"
"the dictator," out of his hearing.
He opens the paper he bought in Kingman,
Senator Joe McCarthy with his wide forehead
and dark eyebrows glares at him in black and white.
She studies her husband as if he were a rare
eggshell brocade she has never seen before.
The bump on his head, a wound from a rock
thrown by a Jew-hating soldier in Russia years ago
shines in the dim motel light.

Her husband taught himself English while driving a bus,
the book in his lap, eye on the road,
how proud he was to follow Teddy Roosevelt
up San Juan Hill, how he always stopped to salute
the statue of the soldier at the Veterans Cemetery.
He loves this country that gave him his freedom.

Sweat, which he calls perspiration, dripping
down his neck he sat bent all summer
over the McCarthy hearings
as if he were sitting shiva.

"Meshugener," she whispers again.
"You think the fat Senator is after you."
She frees a chicken leg from its wax paper
and hands it to my grandfather,
his hat still on his lap.

PENNY PERRY

LEAH WOLFF, IMPOSSIBLE SHAPE 108, 2012, WATERCOLOR AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 9 X 12 IN.

BLT JUDAISM

by RACHEL KADISH

How the BLT, once the ultimate taboo sandwich, became a ritual food.

My grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, used to tell the story of the family's escape from Europe—a harrowing narrative that included bombings and imprisonment and hunger and frostbite, near-misses and unexpected escapes. One small piece of that story concerned the family's passage across Siberia by train in 1940. As the train rumbled slowly across the Russian landscape, my grandparents got hold of some food, including a large and apparently very tasty pork sausage.

Whatever my family's privations on that train ride, at that point in their journey they were not going so hungry that eating that sausage was a matter of life or death. They ate it anyway and proclaimed it delicious. My Orthodox great-grandfather, a tolerant soul, sat in another car and graciously pretended not to know.

That story has always stuck in my head. And in the way of childhood stories, it's become part of my map of the world.

My mother, whose family was dispersed by the war and later settled mainly in Israel, wanted her children to grow up speaking Hebrew. My father, who grew up working alongside his father in a sweeping-compound factory in Newark and whose Jewish education was far more basic and low-key, was skeptical about religious education for his children but agreed to it nonetheless. So, off to Jewish day school I went, though I always sensed I was there to study language and culture as much as religion.

In school, I was the only kid in my grade whose family admitted to not keeping kosher. And while I was an eager student and liked my classes—and while I was powerfully, indelibly shaped by immersion in currents of language and melody and psalms and argumentation and infinitely layered history—I realized at some point that I saw the stories from the Torah the same way I saw the plays and novels we were reading in English class: All of them were fascinating and instructive, and none of them was word-for-word true.

At some point, too, it occurred to me that the religious people I saw around me, wherever they happened to fit on the spectrum of observance, were all picking and choosing: interpreting laws and verses to fit their world-views and to allow them to sing the songs they wanted to sing, whether these were songs of individualism or community, of pluralism or of tribalism, of freedom or of obedience. Even the strictest among the Orthodox seemed to be picking and choosing, interpreting the law in order to best sing their song, which seemed to me to be a song of safety-through-diligence: The more diligent you were about an infinite proliferation of laws, the more God approved of you, and the safer and more blessed you were in this world.

But it seemed patent to me that God, if there was a God, didn't much care which song one sang, so long as it was sung in good faith. The same train engine that pulled my Orthodox great-grandfather across Siberia and out of harm's way also pulled my sausage-eating grandparents, and at the exact same speed. And I could never wrap my mind around the notion that some heavenly train would eventually decouple and proceed to carry them on different tracks because of their eating habits. Religious practice, as far as I could see, was all a work of art: beautiful, useful wherever it helped us do good, and nothing if not creative.

For a long time, though, I didn't eat pork. I figured, somehow, that since I didn't observe *kashrut* in the larger sense, this was the least I could do. I recall explaining this once to a non-Jewish friend: My grandparents had their world shattered and were nearly killed because of who they were; the least I could do was keep one symbolic custom and not eat pork.

But I soon came to feel that this was the wrong reasoning. It's one thing to keep kosher because you believe it's the right thing to do. But abstaining simply because of Hitler, on the other hand, felt like the wrong motivation. Eventually I came to see my grandparents' sausage-eating story as a story of healthy defiance. Hitler wasn't going to tell them who to be or what to eat, and neither was Jewish law. Keeping faith in their identity, despite the ripping apart of their world, meant sticking with who they actually were: intellectuals with senses of humor; patriotic Poles who were also Zionists; proud and devoted Jews who liked an occasional pork sausage. If I were

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"MO-DIGGIN-LIANI," BY RHEA DENNIS. COURTESY OF THE TEMPLE JUDEA MUSEUM AT KENESETH ISRAEL.

going to shape any notion of kashrut in their honor, it would be a bit absurd to honor a fictitious version of them rather than who they actually were.

As an adult, I've evolved a rather unusual relationship with kashrut. I keep strictly to the Yom Kippur fast; for some reason I don't fully understand, I'm keenly observant about food during Passover; we keep a kosher-style kitchen, and I generally go with my husband's level of observance where it's stricter than mine. But I don't actually believe in keeping kosher. I don't feel sheepish about it, either—because, though my childhood teachers would disagree, I don't think that morality is necessarily on the side of the more observant and the rest of us are just failing to live up to it. I have my own principled reasons for *not* keeping kosher. Among them: I have too many dear non-Jewish friends to feel comfortable with the exclusion that often goes with kashrut. Kashrut too readily becomes a dividing line between who is "in" and who is "out" of a community—a permission slip to violate basic neighborly openness. If our most basic form of human generosity is food, then I never want the message I send to friends and neighbors to be a demeaning *your food isn't good enough for our table.*

At the same time, I'm a product of nine years of Jewish day school, and this means an awareness of the taboos around food is ingrained in me. I will never be able to eat a BLT without being aware of breaking a taboo.

This, of course, makes BLTs delicious. And since we all need breakable taboos in life, the BLT has over the years become my pressure-valve of choice. When I am having a truly lousy day—when something is driving me so profoundly nuts that I want to catch a shuttle to Jupiter; when I want to quit every responsibility I have, but of course I can't—the BLT is waiting for me in that little psychic box marked *in case of emergency, break glass.*

I ration my BLTs. I eat one maybe once a year, sometimes only once every two years. What's more, I calibrate my position on the BLT scale with grim glee. I will text my friend Tova: ice dam w roof leak, kids home sick, am at BLT DEFCON 2. The BLT scale has become a way to register protest and at the same time soldier on. It's for those moments when I've had it with suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and would dearly love to take up some god-damn arms for once against a sea of troubles—but am forced to acknowledge that it's a lot less messy and a lot less damaging to just take myself out for a sandwich.

My own children attend Jewish day school now. I send them there so they can learn Hebrew and Jewish text and literature—and so that, should they choose to do so, they'll have the tools to sing their own songs in a Jewish key. And if it happens to be my personal preference that they go on to use this knowledge to lead somewhat heretical lives, then what of it? That choice isn't up to me, and I know it, and that's fine. Religious faith offers a comfort I've often wished I had—and just because I've never found a navigable path to belief doesn't mean my kids shouldn't be able to. Some of my favorite people are religious, and if my kids end up religious, I'll still love them just as much. Even if it means one day I need to buy a new set of dishes.

It may be that in sending my children to a Jewish day school while practicing my own form of sometimes-attitudinal Judaism, I'm teaching hypocrisy. But I don't think so—that is, not unless you count every single picker-and-chooser in the tribe as a hypocrite. I think I'm encouraging my kids to recognize both the riches *and* the freedom available to them in ritual, to size up the principle of a thing, and chart their own course within the system—or outside of it. Whether that course leads to pork sausages or observance of kashrut will be up to them.

For now, my kids know I sometimes eat treyf—but not, I think, that I *davka* eat treyf. Nor that the BLT has somehow evolved, without my intending it, into a ritual food.

But when the day inevitably comes when they overhear me discussing my DEFCON status, I hope to pass along a family legacy: Choose your own devotions, whatever they are. Break the rules consciously, break the rules because you believe in breaking them, break the rules and hold your head high. And then sing your heart out. ■

Rachel Kadish is the author of the novels From a Sealed Room *and* Tolstoy Lied: a Love Story, *as well as the forthcoming novella* I Was Here.

I'm a product of nine years of Jewish day school, and this means an awareness of the taboos around food is ingrained in me. I will never be able to eat a BLT without being aware of breaking a taboo. This, of course, makes BLTs delicious.

"BUBBY'S WISDOM," BY DIANE PIERI. COURTESY OF THE TEMPLE JUDEA MUSEUM AT KENESETH ISRAEL

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SHOULD A JEWISH GIRL WEAR A DIRNDL?

(And Other Questions about Jews and Tracht*)*

by KAREN ENGEL

ILLUSTRATION BY SHIFRA WHITEMAN

It was Erev Rosh Hashana and my 19-year-old daughter, Janina, was joining us at synagogue after spending the day at a city-wide festival in the province of southern Austria where we live. Every September, folk music groups, artisans, folk dancers, and a lot of tourists throng the medieval streets of Graz to celebrate Styrian folk culture, which importantly includes dirndls—a traditional dress with an apron, bodice and relatively low-cut blouse. Not only are dirndls not typical feminist attire, but Jews, historically speaking, have a troubled relationship with them, as well as with their male counterpart, lederhosen.

So when Janina breezed into shul that warm September evening dressed like an Austrian peasant, a visitor turned to her and asked incredulously, "Are you *Jewish*?"

Janina, who grew up in Graz and has attended services her whole life here, was deeply offended.

"Of course I'm Jewish," she answered.

FOR MANY JEWS, DIRNDLS AND lederhosen are almost on the order of swastikas, associated as they are with right-wing political groups and with the Nazi glorification of German *volk* culture. When the Nazis marched into Austria in 1938, one of the first things they did was ban Jews from wearing them.

Tracht (the German term for traditional folkloric dress) was popular among Jews and other members of the rising upper and middle classes before the Holocaust, especially the well-to-do who packed up their belongings each summer and moved to Alpine resorts like Bad Ischl and Bad Aussee. Dressing up in Tracht was campy and fun, and it was also an appropriation of Austrian insider-ness. When Hitler forbade Jews to wear dirndls and lederhosen, he understood the semiotics.

In the last few years, Tracht has staged a fashionable comeback in both Austria and Germany, and it's suddenly not uncommon to see teens and twenty-somethings wearing dirndls and lederhosen to weddings, parties and even to the office. Variations abound, from traditional fabrics and designs specific to certain regions or towns (like the Black Forest and Bad Aussee) to "designer Tracht" by such rising stars as Lena Hoschek who mixes old motifs with new styles and fabrics. Gloria Cudjo of Hamburg has started a unique line of Tracht that uses African materials—a culture-clash expression of her Ghana-German identity. And then, of course, there's always Tracht kitsch for tourists, immutably gaudy and inexpensive.

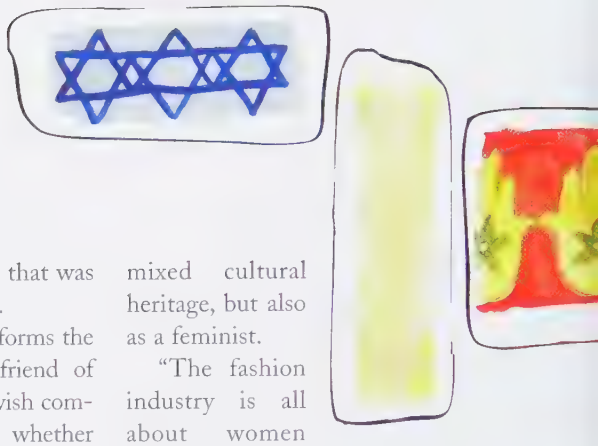
But a *Jewish* girl wearing a dirndl?

WELL, THE HISTORY OF TRACHT is bound up with Jews in more ways than one. Although dirndls and lederhosen originated some 400 years ago as the work clothes of Alpine peasants—with a finer version for Sundays and holidays designating a person's social, marital and economic status—they became more popular in the 19th century, largely as a romantic response to the modern industrial age.

Tracht was worn mainly in the countryside. In 1900, though, two Jewish brothers, Julius and Moritz Wallach, opened a clothing store in the Bavarian city of Munich and had the clever and successful idea of marketing dirndls and lederhosen as a kind of urban "rural chic." In 1939, the Wallachs' store was "Aryanized." And today, when one thinks of all the lederhosen and dirndls worn by beer-guzzling Germans (and tourists) at Munich's huge Oktoberfest, it's odd to think about two Jews spearheading this fashion trend.

Before the Holocaust, Jews not only wore Tracht, they were also germinal ethnographers of Alpine and folkloric culture. In the 1920s, Eugenie Goldstern's research on Alpine cultures of the Habsburg monarchy was groundbreaking in its focus on how these societies adapted to change. This was in contrast to other scholars' idealized presentation of Alpine life as untainted by, and immune to, change. Goldstern's collections of folk art and artifacts became important mainstays of both the Vienna and Bern museums of folklore.

She fought against the nationalist and racist ideologies that were ruggedly in



vogue in the field of ethnography in her time, but she failed to recognize how dangerous they had really become. In June of 1942, Goldstern was deported from Vienna to Lublin, where she died in the Sobibor extermination camp.

Much of what we know today about Austrian folk music (and Alpine culture as well) is thanks to another Austrian Jew, Konrad Mautner (1880–1924), the son of a Viennese textile merchant who loved the country life. He spoke dialect, wore lederhosen, and relished hunting, fishing, singing, dancing and smoking with the locals of the small village of Gössl in the picturesque Salzkammergut region of Austria. Mautner's collections of Austrian folk songs and Tracht are fundamental to today's understanding of Austrian folk culture.

Since 2006, the Konrad Mautner Prize has been awarded every two years to a person who promotes the wearing of Tracht. In 2008, the award went to the Austrian actor and writer Miguel Herz-Kestrenek, who happens also to be a Jew; he comes from a prominent, assimilated Austrian-Jewish family.

"My father was forbidden to wear [lederhosen] and so was my grandfather. I wear lederhosen precisely because Jews were once forbidden to," he said in his acceptance speech. "Tracht is not the expression of, nor a relic of, the era of blood, soil and race, but rather a protest against it. It is not a uniform, but its opposite: an expression of extreme individualism, not only from valley to valley, but from village to village."

Herz-Kestrenek received the prize exactly 70 years after the *Anschluss* of Austria to Nazi Germany, a fact that was noted prominently in his speech.

Herz-Kestrenek's logic also informs the attitudes of Claudia Saltiel, a friend of mine and a member of Graz's Jewish community. Claudia hates uniforms, whether dictated by the military or fashion. She not only grew up wearing dirndls, but her family includes four generations of Jewish dirndl-wearing women. She says that her grandmother, who was originally from Czernowitz (in today's Romania), wore dirndls to "fit in" with Bad Ischl society. Her mother, as a very young girl in Salzburg, survived the Holocaust in hiding—and after that always wore dirndls as was common in the Salzburg region, where she continued to live after the war. Claudia's daughter, Rivka, wears dirndls from time to time because, she says simply, "I like them."

When Hitler banned Jews from wearing dirndls and lederhosen, he understood the semiotics.

IT'S ONE THING, THOUGH, WHEN your friends wear dirndls, and another when your own daughter starts wearing them. As a Jewish-American feminist who moved to Austria more than 20 years ago as a radio reporter, I have mixed feelings about Tracht.

I have to admit that dirndls have a very flattering cut, and at different times during their childhoods, I dressed both my girls in them for special occasions. The girls always looked adorable; never overdressed or sexy. Unlike my daughters, though, I am not even half-Austrian, so dirndls aren't part of my heritage.

My daughter Janina, who graduated from a secondary school that specializes in fashion design, tells me that she likes dirndls not only as an expression of her mixed cultural heritage, but also as a feminist.

"The fashion industry is all about women being skinny, and the dirndl is a statement in defiance of that," she says. "It doesn't matter how fat or how skinny you are; women with very curvy bodies look great in dirndls."

She also has feelings about wearing that dirndl to synagogue.

"Jews especially should wear them because there were laws prohibiting us from doing so. I want to signal that I'm Jewish, I'm Austrian, and I'm proud to be both Jewish and Austrian. We live in the 21st century! This should not even be a question."

Nonetheless, I doubted I would ever wear a dirndl myself—except then I realized that I already had. A few years ago, I came across the only image of me as a child taken by a professional photographer: in a dirndl. I don't know who chose that outfit—my parents were Polish- and American-born, my father losing many family members in the Holocaust—and today I can't ask them anymore.

But they must've seen the dirndl as simply a dress. Is it time for me to try to do that, too? ■

Karen Engel has reported for NPR, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation and Deutsche Welle, and co-founded a Jewish cultural center in Graz. Her daughter Janina was the first girl in Graz to chant from the Torah; her daughter Milena the first to chant her Haftorah as well.

THE IDIOMS OF JEWISH DRESS: BUTTONS, WIGS & GARTELS

by ERIC SILVERMAN

IN THE 17TH CENTURY, EUROPEAN authorities initiated the slow repeal of mandatory Jewish dress codes. Vienna annulled its regulations in 1624, followed by Mannheim (1691), Austria (1781), Rome (1798), Prussia (1812), and elsewhere. For the first time in five centuries, Jews could legally dress like everybody else. Especially after the French Revolution, ideals such as equality and self-determination made it increasingly difficult to marginalize Jews simply on the basis of their Jewishness.

Historically, French law assigned old-fashioned yellow hats to Jews; everybody else wore black caps. But during an April 1790 festival, the Jews of Avignon, flush with the revolutionary promise of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, donned black hats to dance with their Gentile compatriots—themselves clad in yellow caps. Shortly thereafter, local Jews demanded permission to unlock the ghetto gates at night and to permanently doff the yellow chapeaux they had endured for centuries. One year later, the Jews of Avignon finally received their just prize: citizenship. They could now enjoy the black hat so symbolic of French fashion and equality.

The situation proved rather more ironic, though, at the nearby enclave of Comtat Venaissin. When the regional assembly in October 1790 untied Jews from yellow hats, the local populace rioted. Some Jews, fearful for the lives, requested the revival of the old dress code. In the city of Carpentras, Jews refused to swap their yellow hats lest they contravene biblical and rabbinic law by emulating Gentiles. The cap that for so long derided Jews now served, *by their own choosing*, to define them.

BY THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY, imperial Russian decrees targeted all manner of stereotypical Jewish dress, including silk hoods, fur hats, short trousers, and sashes. Jewish women, declared one edict, "should wear simple garments, similar to what Russian women wear. Without question, they are forbidden to wear wigs of any sort that match their hair color." Only the elderly received exemptions.

Many Jews did change "their national costume," as one Russian official reported in 1845, but other Jews saw the new restrictions as an outright assault on Judaism. "Our traditional costume," reports one memoir (Pauline Wengeroff's *Rememberings: The World of a Russian-Jewish Woman in the 19th Century*), "was mourned like a beloved departed person." Some Jews refused to leave their homes. They wept, prayed, and fasted.

Similar events unfolded in the Polish territories, partly to foster Jewish assimilation, partly to revive the national textile industry. Edicts prohibited Jewish men from appearing in long beards, ear-locks, silk and woolen cloaks, broad *gartel* belts ("meant to protect the purity of the mind from lower body carnality and pollution"), fur hats, short trousers with stockings, and old-fashioned caps lacking a modern peak.

For the first time in five centuries, Jews could legally dress like everybody else.

Jewish women were similarly told to dispense with their turbans, "Jewish cut" dresses, colored shoes, and characteristic ornaments. With the exception of the home and synagogue, Jews would henceforth appear like other citizens.

A modern dress code for Jews, proclaimed the Duchy of Warsaw, would assist "the progress of civilization of that people." As incentive, the territory granted properly attired Jews special residential and occupational privileges. But most Jews could afford to pay for neither a new outfit nor an exemption tariff, and so they were beaten, forcefully shorn, and sometimes imprisoned.

IRONICALLY, EDICTS DEMANDING assimilation actually fostered a self-conscious sense of Jewishness, especially among educated and urban Jews who otherwise tethered their identity to modernist aspirations. Many Jews, too, responded to these revised dress codes by investing their garments with deep emotional and religious significance.

Clothing merely worn by Jews now became seen as traditional Jewish clothing, symbolizing traditional Jewish values. For example, the norm in modern male fashion is to button coats and shirts left over right. But Hasidic men, like modern women, button right over left. These conventions undoubtedly arose through happenstance. Nonetheless, Hasidic men came to see their buttons as symbolizing the triumph of divine mercy and goodness, which the medieval mystics associated with the right side of the body, over the harsh judgment and demonic powers of the left side. Jews who button in a modern fashion, declared Rabbi Menachem Mendel from Rimanov, walk in the ways of idolaters.

State-sponsored efforts to assimilate Jews transformed certain garments from mere custom into a religious obligation. Modernity tailored tradition. ■

Adapted from A Cultural History of Jewish Dress *(Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).*

fiction by HILARY ZAID

Sorry, doll. I was just finishing my program." My grandmother snaps off her TV set, which has been blaring "Let's Make a Deal" at a volume for which hearing aids are not required. We've assumed our usual places in the set piece of her rent-controlled apartment, Grandmom curled into the pale blue La-Z-Boy my uncles bought her after her bypass, me perched on the 40-year-old, butt-punched couch cushions with the velveteen flowers I used to flick my fingertips across for the softness. The dusty olive carpet spools out between us, a sea of thumbprint-like whorls.

This is the good part. Grandmom has just tilted her wide, freckled face my way. The TV has swirled down to a single, colored dot behind her head and her hazel eyes go big and bright as headlights trained on me behind glasses printed with the afterimage of her thumbs; I've just arrived here in her living room and I have not yet told my grandmother that she is dead.

But it's coming. That part's as sure a thing as my next breath. My grandmother died before I was ready, this is my recurring dream, and this is the rule: I don't get to see her face for more than a minute before I have to break the spell of reunion. It's a bittersweet proximity, this teasing glance in which we are near enough to graze the soft fuzz of each other's cheeks, but we cannot touch.

Grandmom leans forward, as if to pull the lever at the side of her chair, as if to launch her little, hunched body into the kitchen to find me food. I know there's nothing in the fridge but a half tub of sour cream (full fat, even though she shouldn't) and a blood-purple bottle of Manischewitz borscht. I know there's a tin of mandelbrot she keeps specifically for me next to the containers marked Flour and Sugar.

This is a woman who woke from a coma when she heard me, standing by her hospital bed, utter the words "I'm hungry." She could almost pull it off. Waking from the dead.

But I know she won't make it into her Sav-On velour slippers. Before the dot on the TV has vaporized with its static hiss, a compulsion to enforce the rules of mortality will force my lips apart and I will kill the instant with The Truth. Every encounter I've had with Grandmom in the past 20 years proves my tenacity: I just can't help myself.

Well, fuck that.

Grandmom and I are together in her apartment, and this time, I am going to make her stay.

My therapist, Madeleine, says that all the characters in my dreams are me. "But you're a Jungian. You're supposed to believe that the supernatural is true," I counter her, poking a finger toward her shelf of dragon and princess figurines. Madeleine creaks back in her black Eames chair; she's used to my teasing, even when it's not teasing. She points out that, even in dreams, the dead eventually grow disinterested; they get tired of hanging out with the living. She's worried about my sad obsession with my grandmother—concern whiskers the corners of her eyes. She says that confronting a loved one to tell her she has died is an ancient motif—as old as the worm that Gilgamesh saw drop out of Enkidu's nose—but it's a figment of early grief. She thinks I should be past this stage by now.

"Remember Lars," she urges.

This is what comes of telling someone else your dreams.

Lars was the photographer who shared studio space with me for five years when I was painting 10-foot-tall still lifes of oranges and lemons, Lars pinning up glossy black-and-whites of himself, alone, at the peak of every mountaintop on earth. He was the first working artist I knew, the person who made me feel like I was doing something real. When Lars went home to his parents' house and hanged himself from the shower head in the guest bathroom, I curled up with my sleeping toddler, with his flushed cheeks and oranges-and-lemons pajama suit, and dreamed that I saw Lars retreating into a little house across a Japanese bridge and shutting the small red door. "I'm sorry you died!" I cried. Lars didn't say anything, but as he pulled the door shut, he nodded sadly, his face scruffed with the crust of his beard, as if he were sorry, too, but it was the way it had to be.

Sometimes a bald, Norwegian face with a blunt nose and bright eyes still shocks me, but in that dream Lars and I had said goodbye.

Madeleine marvels that Grandmom and I have kept our routine up so long. "My grandmother isn't the same as Lars," I pick at the couch in protest. Lars and I had shared the same space, but you couldn't even really say we'd been friends. I'd admired him as an artist; you could even say that I'd needed him as a role model, but it wasn't the same thing. Madeleine cradled a tiny still life of mine, a plate of olives knifed coal black against a little board in her hand; after Lars, I had become a miniaturist. She is not the type to accept denial.

"What are you holding onto? What part of you needs to remain a child?"

Holding onto? I'd gotten married, hadn't I? I'd had a child of my own. I'd become responsible for nothing less than the grueling, crumb-strewn marathon of another human life. "I just want a little more time. Is that so much to ask?"

Sitting in my grandmother's apartment—A rent-controlled apartment in Santa Monica! That alone is worth staying on my grandmother's couch for another 20 years!—it occurs to me that if I can get Grandmom hooked on something else, she won't get out of her chair, and if she doesn't get out of her chair, I won't have to open my mouth, and if I don't open my mouth, I can sit with her in her apartment and hear her breathe, and I won't have to say goodbye to her again. My eyes dart from her freckles to the candy dish filled with Nips, then back to the guttering TV.

On Hulu, I remember, all the seasons of "The Amazing Race" are free.

Grandmom has never seen this show: Twelve teams, seven continents, a race around the world. It's so addictive. Better than I could have hoped. Grandmom and I have made it to Season 17, the one with Nat and Kat—the slim, smiling young doctors who want to be the first female team to win the million-dollar prize. Nat is diabetic and terrified of heights; she has great breasts. Kat is a 15-year vegetarian. When they make it to a Fast Forward, the part where they can surge ahead of all the other teams if they eat an entire goat's head roasted on a platter, Kat scoops the greasy eyeballs up in her fingers and smacks her lips: "Tastes like money!" It's impossible not to root for these girls, even if they're not a couple, because they make it look so easy. Even when Nat is on the gondola up the Alps, tears streaming down her dewy face, her frown, over her huge white teeth, looks like a brilliant smile.

Reality TV didn't exist when Grandmom was alive, unless you count "The Price Is Right." We have traveled more countries

ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK

in the last three hours than my grandmother ever visited in her life. Grandmom stays glued to her seat while I root through her kitchen for the tin of cookies. During the Hong Kong leg, we gobble all the mandel. Mandel bits pebble the couch. I *knew* that she would love this show, I congratulate myself. Maybe I'll sleep through my own life. Maybe when I wake up from this dream, my little son will be a man.

"You used to have to wait for TV, you know," Grandmom raises two plucked eyebrows while I click forward to the next episode. *Wait for TV?* In reality, Grandmom doesn't know a thing about Hulu instant video. In this world, though, she has a thing or two to teach me.

When Nat and Kat win the million dollars, Grandmom makes me promise that we will not get hooked on another season of "The Amazing Race." "Do you know how terrified Nat was to fall off the top of that shipping crane?" At first I think she's just being coy, but when I realize she's serious, I start to panic. Grandmom tilts forward in her chair, just like Nat, dangling hundreds of feet above the Port of Long Beach by a rubber bungee cord. Except Grandmom has no bungee cord. She's just gripping a scrunched tissue she's pulled out of her sleeve; her curled hand presses her heart next to the scar. I'm afraid that she's going to keel over on the floor in front of me, that the universe is about to slap me for keeping her pinned here to the earth with reality TV.

Grandmom waves off another season: "I don't want to get inveigled!" And then she pulls on her velour slippers.

In a moment, she's at the door of her apartment, the one labeled with the same letter as my name, decorated with the construction paper rainbow I colored and cut out in second grade, warped but still scotch-taped to the inside of the door. I haven't heard any knock, but Grandmom peeps through the hole, opens the door and welcomes a great wave of talcum powder and Chanel No. 5. I recognize my Great-Aunt Carol, known for good reason as Kix. Aunt Kix, who was eight years younger than my Grandmom but outlived her by almost 20 years, died two days ago. She would have been 100 on her next birthday to my Grandmom's meager 85. The Last of the Mohicans, Aunt Kix, and she's got somewhere to go. Kitted out in a fox stole and high heels, her hair set like a golden bubble and her cheeks freshly powdered, Aunt Kix doesn't say anything, and neither do I. I hadn't realized Grandmom and I were waiting for someone. I thought we were just hanging out. I thought I was the reason Grandmom was still here.

Grandmom is already in the bathroom she stocks with rose-colored toilet paper. She's changed into a lilac blouse and she's spraying her hair with AquaNet, teasing it up. Aunt Kix shifts in her sleek coat, her Italian shoes, impatient to get going. Aunt Kix lived across the country. She only came to visit Grandmom once a year, and when she came to visit, she ferried Grandmom out for their annual gambling excursion, Aunt Kix to play blackjack and Grandmom to hit the slots. They're about to hop a bus to Vegas. Time to leave the kids behind.

"Grandmom—" my throat hurts. That old compulsion strikes the way I guess it must, and my voice splits, reedy with regret. What would Madeleine say now? I thought I'd found a clever way around this ending, and yet we're barreling toward the moment that always leaves me smeared and choking on my pillow.

Grandmom has already fished her teeth out of the Fleishman's margarine tub where they bob between us in a fizzing sea of EfferDent. Her wicker purse is looped over her arm, the basket-like thing with Atlantic City painted around the edges and a lucky penny glued to the top, and she's heading for the door. "Grandmom—" I sputter. *Please don't leave me here alone.*

I thought I'd found a clever way around this ending, and yet we're barreling toward the moment that always leaves me smeared and choking on my pillow.

"Lock up when you're done," Grandmom blows me a kiss; her false teeth click. *Grandmom, wait!* Already they're out the door, clacking in their square heels down the stairs. Even in sleep, I can feel the words claw at my throat, the flood of tears leaking past the frail wings of my closed eyelashes. I want to tell her I love her. I want to tell her I miss her. It's my job to tell her that she's left this world. But Grandmom and Aunt Kix are light years ahead of me. Ashy diesel fumes wash in on the cool, salt air off Ocean Avenue; the perfumes and powders of their century dissolve. By the time I pull it together to cry out "Grandmom, you died!" the two of them are gone. ■

Hilary A. Zaid is an alumna of the 2013 Tin House Writers Workshop and is the James D. Houston Scholar at the 2012 Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Her fiction has recently been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and is forthcoming in Bloom *and* Prick of the Spindle.

CHET

Not the aspirate in *achoo*,
transliterated *CH*
like a *faux ami*
tricks the American eye.

Worn fingernail-sized for luck
where a neighbor dangles the cross,
this letter coughs up the *Fiddler* cliché
with a sound of choking on life, *chai*,

and my great-grandfather's name.
Renamed *Hyman*
by some Port of Baltimore
official with a sense of humor,

Chaim stands like a wrestler
on the sepia card.
His immigrant hands, big as prayer-books,
could knock a child of either sex

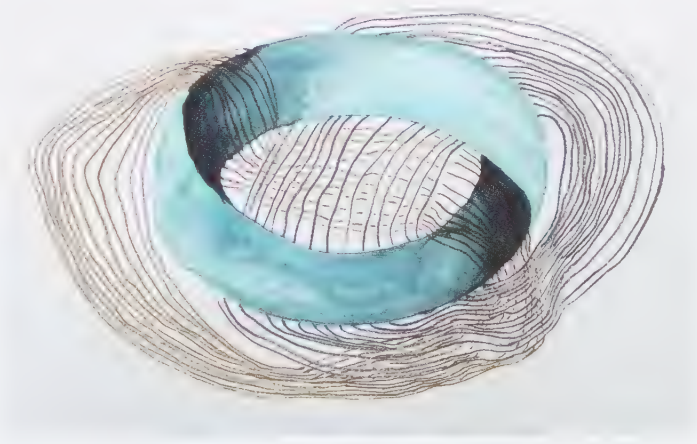
across a room, without closing.
This is how my grandmother lost
her hearing in one ear.
If she didn't like what you were saying,

it went into that ear.
My mother's Hebrew name, *Chanah*,
biblical woman who seemed drunk
when she cried to God,

begins with this sound.
And *chayot* is the word for creatures
from which the Travelers' Prayer
seeks protection,

like the moose on a Maine highway
that stepped before my step-brother's Chevy.
When the boy realized he was alive,
a moose song came out of him.

SHERI ALLEN



LEAH WOLFF: IMPOSSIBLE SHAPE 28, 2012. WATERCOLOR AND GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 9 X 12 IN.

Four Photographs of Rukhl

by MIRIAM ISAACS

There are only four photographs of Rukhl, and I have never found anyone who knew her. She was my father's first wife, the mother of his son, Avrom. One day, mother and child disappeared from this world, and no one has ever told their story. This task has been on my life-list; it falls to me.

Rukhl's maiden name was Kalb, and her nickname Ruzhie. She had two brothers, Meylekh and Aaron, and a sister, Miriam. She and my father, both born in 1909, came from a *kleyn shtetl* in the Carpathian foothills of Galicia, Poland (then Austro-Hungary) that the Jews called Isterik, and the Poles, Ustryke Dolne.

The first photo shows Rukhl in 1930, in a group portrait of the Jewish drama club of Isterik. Young adults, in their late teens and early twenties, posing against a pastoral backdrop. My father, Israel, then called Srulke, is in the middle row, center, between two dark-haired girls. He wears a fancy suit and tie, and still has some hair. Above him, and just to the left, is Rukhl; square-jawed, serious, challenging the camera.

Because I know something about this time and place, I recognize that the clothing on these young folks, though ordinary-looking, bespeaks a revolution. Even 10 years earlier, Jewish girls this age would have been buttoned to the neck; the boys would have sported beards and head-coverings. The parents of these *mode nouvelle*-niks abruptly became a distant generation. Still Orthodox, they wore *shaytls* and long sleeves, long beards and *talis kotn*.

The photo captures a breathless new world, though you can see that the males in the club still outnumber the females two-to-one. It was still shocking for a Jewish girl to act in the theatre.

In the bottom row, a young woman holds a sign in Yiddish: "An-sky Drama Club." S. An-sky, who wrote the gothic-Hasidic play *The Dybbuk*, was an ethnographer and leftist polemicist who lost his original manuscript as he fled Bolshevik Russia; he later reconstituted the Yiddish from Chaim Nachman Bialik's Hebrew translation. An-sky had toured my father's region of Galicia between 1911 and 1914, gathering fading Jewish legends.

According to my father's memoir, written in 1984, the year before he died (which I have translated, but not yet published), he and Rukhl first met when she was a volunteer librarian at Isterik's I.L. Peretz club, a literary organization named after the seminal Yiddish writer. Rukhl introduced Srulke to the world of "good writers," my father said; an arousing experience, no doubt, for a young man whose formal education consisted of one year of mandated secular schooling in Hungary at age six (my grandmother had fled to her mother's house there as World War I raged from 1914 to 1918) and tiny bits of Orthodox Jewish schooling from the age of 3. My grandfather, a poor *bal agulah* (wagoner), only occasionally had the pittance for a *melamed* (teacher).

I.L. Peretz had a literary salon in faraway Warsaw where he nurtured younger writers and readers, daring them to flee the restrictive confines of Orthodox yeshivas. For my father and Rukhl's generation, their rural shtetl was a desperate dead-end: no jobs, no education, no chance for mobility of any kind. Rukhl introduced Srulke to literature translated into Yiddish—Jules Verne, Victor Hugo, Jack London—and Yiddish classics. The magic in these books must have stunned and transported them.

My father's rebellion began, he told me, with furtive *shabbos* cigarettes smoked behind the shul. Why behind the shul, I don't know. Before long he was eating bacon; specifically, he said, to defy his father. Throughout his life, my father kept kosher, never mixing meat and milk, or eating shellfish. His bacon-eating, though, remained foundational. His little brother, Moishe-Aaron, had had a tumor in his throat, but their father refused the recommendation of greasing the toddler's esophagus with bacon fat, and my father watched Moishe-Aaron choke to death. When I was grown and my father lived in Israel, I knew to mail him tins of bacon so he could stay faithful to this protest.

In 1930 or 1931, Rukhl, age 21, got the chance to dump Isterik and move into her aunt's apartment in the closest big city, Krakow. Shortly thereafter, my father was drafted into the Polish reserves for six months (the Isterik Jews becoming Polish, not Austrian, citizens overnight), and he often told me that he treasured that time, not only for its abrupt freedoms, but for his having, for the first time, enough to eat. Upon his release, he went straight to Krakow, showing up at Rukhl's aunt's apartment with only the clammy woolen uniform that was on his back; it was a sweltering summer day.

The apartment consisted of one cramped room with three beds, a sink and a coal stove. Rukhl's aunt and uncle slept in one bed; Rukhl and her sister Miriam in another; and in the third slept Miriam's boyfriend and my father. Rukhl and my father believed in "free love," though, so they managed, I assume, to find private moments.

Work in Krakow was very hard to find. Rukhl and Miriam, though, worked ceaselessly as tailors, and my father was lucky to find work for an upholsterer as a "human mule," as he called it, carrying heavy sofas to and from customers. Occasionally the good-hearted upholsterer let Srulke watch him work, and my father acquired the skill that would become key to his survival.

Miriam had a baby, and because her income was vital to the family, she hired a poor girl from Isterik who came to live in the crowded Krakow apartment to tend the infant. One day, though, the girl fell asleep, the crib collapsed, and the baby died. Miriam became severely depressed. My father's mother, an herbalist, sent her St. John's Wort to bathe in, but it didn't work. Miriam, in her depression, was also refusing to have sex with her husband, and the latter finally consulted a rabbi. He mandated that my father and Rukhl forcibly hold Miriam down while her husband raped her. So they did. My father was traumatized by this. I can only imagine what it was like for Rukhl, not to mention Miriam. Miriam conceived, though, and had another child.

After two years of living together, cramped and stressed and poor, Srulke and Rukhl decided to marry. It was 1933, the year Hitler came into power in Germany. The nuptial couple, returning to Isterik for Passover and their wedding, discovered that Rukhl's mother had just died from "overwork"—from the backbreaking threshing and grinding and trudging and hauling and whitewashing and scouring and kashering required of Jewish women in preparation for Pesach. Shortly thereafter, my father lost his mother as well.

The second photo I have shows husband and wife sunbathing in a park, the Krakow castle visible in the background, Rukhl looking pregnant. My father has less hair. They look well-fed and happy.

I know that they had their own apartment by this time, a fixer-upper, and that my father had steady work in his trade. The two of them were politically active in the Bund, the Jewish-Socialist organization that stood for a shiny proletarian future in which Pole and Jew would be comrades forever.

Ah, yes, the third photo. Rukhl is in the middle—happy and fat, looking prosperous and fashionable; her baby on her hip. I believe this is the only photo proving the existence of Avrom, proving that I had a half-brother. He has big ears. My ghost-brother had big ears.

My father and Rukhl are paying a visit to their shtetl Isterik here (I can tell from the rustic-looking fence), and Rukhl and Avrom are posing with my father's brother, Yosl, his wife, whose name is lost to me, and their son, Getzl.

Rukhl, I think, is more expensively dressed than her sister-in-law; she's an urban sophisticate. Yosl stayed in Isterik, but it looks like he did okay, too, cobbling and making boots.

The fourth photo. This photo just came into my possession, and I am still in shock. Sixty-five years after acquiring the other photographs! The first three photos survived the war only because my father had sent them, during the up-and-up years, to his brother Calman, who left Poland in the 1920s to settle in Montevideo, Uruguay. Uncle Calman mailed them back to us when we arrived in Canada, in 1948. It strikes me now that this was a very empathic thing to do, bespeaking helplessness. He knew the family had lost everything, so he mailed us our past.

At the end of the war, my father returned to his apartment in Krakow. He'd spent the war in a gulag in Russia, then in Kyrgystan; then he enlisted in the Soviet army to fight the Germans at the front.

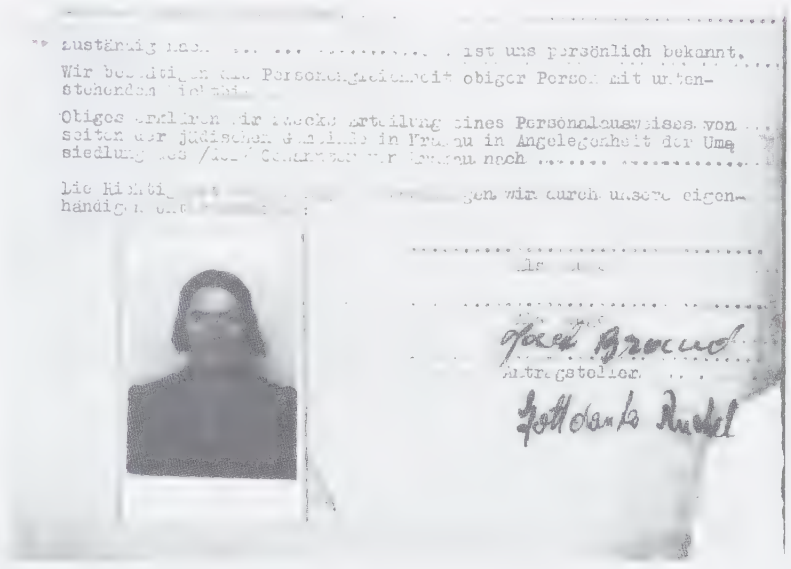
He had already stopped in Isterik and found not a single member of his family alive. When he knocked on his apartment door in Krakow, he told me his heart had left his chest, that he knocked in a trance of dread. But when the door opened, all of his familiar furniture was in place, his pictures on the walls, everything exact, as though not a day had passed. But the woman who opened the door wasn't Rukhl, nor the child Avrom. He said the neighbors, hearing a hubbub, opened their apartment doors and looked, astonished, like they were seeing his ghost.

The municipality had given his apartment to a widow with a child. One neighbor told him that Rukhl had been seen once in a forced labor detail, sweeping the streets. She sneaked over for a moment to beg for bread and was never seen again. I wonder if she got her bread. My father's wife and child were gone without a trace.

So, this last photo, this last photo. It came to me because of the persistent scrounging of Michlean Amir, a librarian at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington. In a loose-leaf folder labeled "Krakow," she found Rukhl's work document, a "Protokoll"—whatever that is—dated February 2, 1940.

In September, 1939, Rukhl's and Srulke's world had abruptly come crashing down. The Nazis were on their way, they were told, and Srulke, a well-known activist in the Bund, was particularly endangered. Rukhl sent him running into the woods where she thought he might be safe. Some weeks later, he tried to creep back towards Krakow, but he was arrested by the Russians as a fifth columnist and sent into forced labor in Ukraine.

From this "Protokoll" I learn so little. It's written in German, signed by a "Josef Brand." I see Rukhl's address: Saltyka 5, Krakow. I'm not sure if that's the address of Rukhl's and my father's apartment.



It's an I.D. photo. A woman looks out, haggard, eyes sunken and dead, yet still alive with tragedy. A woman who has lost everything and also hope. At the time the photo was taken, had she already seen Avrom starve or be killed? A lingering fantasy of mine always puts him into hiding. How anyone could kill children, I could never understand. Rukhl's husband is gone, perhaps alive somewhere, her whole family unreachable, perhaps dead. She doesn't know. She is only 31.

There is little doubt that she did not survive. People in that kind of slave labor were specifically worked until they starved to death, or died of illness or misery.

What is left of you, Ruzhie—librarian, actress, square-jawed, serious girl whose gaze tested the camera? Daughter, sister, activist, wife. Mother. Very young woman. What is left of your passions and struggles?

What is left of you, Ruzhie—librarian, actress, square-jawed, serious girl whose gaze tested the camera? What is left of your passions and struggle?

All that remains are four photos of you, these, and my father's scant brushstrokes in his memoirs. In these photos, though, you still look out at me. Would we have had much to discuss if we had met? But how silly of me, our existences are mutually canceling. If you had survived, I would not exist.

But I am the only one who can leave this testament to your life and your suffering. So I do. In full faith, I do. ■

Miriam Isaacs was born in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, grew up in Montreal and Brooklyn, and taught Yiddish language and literature at the University of Maryland. Her research includes Yiddish publications in postwar Germany and Yiddish-speaking Hasidim.

For many months this past year, the Israeli bestseller list was dominated by two novels: *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James, and *Akiva's Orchard* by Yochi Brandes. The former is an international publishing sensation, an erotic novel about an innocent literature student who finds herself in the thrall of an enigmatic young entrepreneur who wants her, too—but on his own terms. The latter is a biography of Rabbi Akiva as narrated by his wife Rachel, who introduces herself as an *aguna*, a "chained" woman—bound to her husband in marriage, but abandoned by him so that he might study Torah.

The bare bones of the Rabbi Akiva story (and when it is taught to schoolchildren it is always *his* story) tell of Akiva's start as an ignorant shepherd. Rachel recognizes something special in him, and offers to marry him and support him so that he can study. This outrages her wealthy father, who disowns her. Akiva goes off to learn Torah for 24 years, returning as a revered scholar to find his wife impoverished, wizenend, in tatters. The adoring students who accompany Akiva try to shoo away the old beggar woman, but Akiva explains that he (and hence, by extension, they) would be nothing without her faith in him and her sacrifices.

Here, an excerpt from *Akiva's Orchard.*

Mrs. Akiva Speaks

by YOCHI BRANDES
translated from the Hebrew by ILANA KURSHAN

I am shut in this cave for three years now, I stayed alive to write this book, in another four weeks, I will entrust it into Miriam's hands, I have still not called her to come, when she knelt to birth her child, I averted my eyes, I could not bear to see the baby.

A woman without a father or a husband—what does she have in life? Who will support her? Who will take care of her? Who will protect her?

At first I would wait for him, waking on Fridays before dawn so that I would have enough time to shop in the market in Tiberias and to cook his favorite foods. I can't start shopping any earlier, I need to spend five days a week working as a laundress from dawn to dusk, otherwise I will not be able to support Chana.

That first week we went out to greet him in our clean Shabbat dresses. The sun was setting. Shabbat was soon upon us. Chana burst into tears. I put her to sleep without dinner and collapsed next to her on the bed.

In subsequent weeks I would no longer go out to greet him, but I continued to prepare Shabbat dinner in the hope that at any moment, he would open the door and I'd see him enter. He took no vow, unlike my father. His oath rolled off his tongue unawares; he will yet return to me.

The two men in my life left me for opposite reasons—my father banished me because I didn't want to fulfill his dream, and my husband won't return to me because I wanted to fulfill his dream too much. These bitter feuds came together in a cruel trick of fate, resulting in a double betrayal—my father betrayed me because of my devotion to my husband, and my husband betrayed me because of my devotion to my father.

These two men in my life abandoned me, but I have a daughter who gives me joy, a pregnancy that instills in me hope, and sisters in sorrow who offer me comfort. The matriarch Rachel and Michal the daughter of King Saul, my ancestral sisters—I draw strength from your stories. You too were torn between father and husband, you too were betrayed by both. Your father, Rachel, saw you as a tool to achieve his own goals, and your lover, Michal, abandoned you after you saved his life. How similar we are, the stories of our lives cast in the same mold. But your lot is superior to mine, your husband did not leave you, Rachel, and your father did not disown you, Michal. You each were left with one man, enraged and aggrieved, but nonetheless present. Whereas I was abandoned by both my father and my husband, the two men who ought to have been my defenders.

The exhausting work of laundering wears at the skin of my hands and breaks my back, but hope keeps my spirits high. After I give birth, my husband will return to me, certainly if I have a son. After all, a father is obligated to circumcise his son. A crier will convey the message to Lod, and my good neighbors will direct him to me. Lately they are on my side again, now that my husband's coals no longer blacken the walls of their homes.

The contractions wrack my body a month early, my womb opens before it is time, my baby is weak and tiny, I can barely hear his faint cries as he struggles to suckle. My neighbors comfort me, saying that this little boy will be a great man someday, a man among men, like his father who is lean in frame and small in

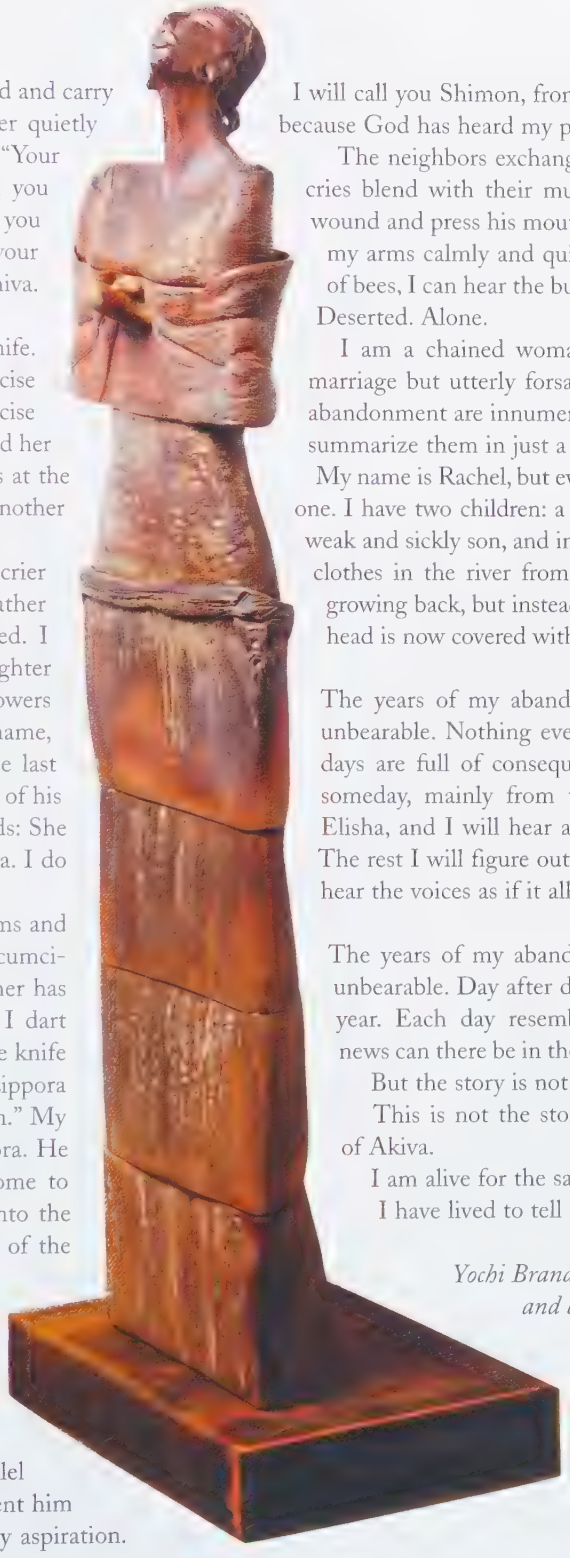
From HaPardes Shel Akiva *by Yochi Brandes. ©2012 by Yochi Brandes. Published in Hebrew by Kinneret Zmora Bitan Dvir Publishing House. Translated and printed with permission of the author and the Kneller Agency.*

stature but who has the strength to split wood and carry coal. I lie on the pottery wheel and whisper quietly to him, so that the neighbors won't hear, "Your strength will be for Torah, my son. When you turn three I will teach you Torah, and when you are five I will send you to school, and when your beard begins to sprout you will enter the yeshiva. You won't have to wait until you are forty."

Although he is still weak, I sharpen the knife. "At the age of eight days you shall circumcise every male." A father is obligated to circumcise his son. Chana cries; ever since her mother sold her hair and her father abandoned her, she weeps at the slightest provocation. Don't cry, my child, in another week your father will come home.

On the morning of the eighth day, the crier returns from Lod. Alone. The neighbors gather around him, their voices angry and agitated. I head outside, the baby in my arms, my daughter clutching the hem of my skirt. The crier lowers his eyes. I enter the yeshiva, I call out his name, they direct me to a bald man sitting on the last row of benches, I share the news of the birth of his son. Your wife expects you, I say. He responds: She is not waiting for Akiva, but for Rabbi Akiva. I do not understand him.

The neighbors take the baby from my arms and rest him on the stone. It is time for the circumcision, it's forbidden to delay it. If a boy's father has left, another man circumcises him instead. I dart forwards and spread his tiny legs, holding the knife confidently in my steady hands. "And Tzippora took a sharp stone and cut her son's foreskin." My husband is like Moses and I am like Tzippora. He is off fulfilling his destiny, and I stayed home to circumcise you, my son. You hereby enter into the covenant of our forefather Abraham, father of the Jewish people. He too left his land and his birthplace and his father's house; the realization of his illustrious destiny required this act of desertion. All our great leaders were exiled from their homes in order to realize their destinies: Abraham and Jacob, Moses and David, Elijah and Jeremiah, Hillel and Rabbi Yohanan, and your father too. I sent him to learn Torah, which was my dream and my aspiration.



TANIA KRAVATH, WOOD FIRED CERAMIC FOUNTAIN, 2013, 64" x 24" x 24"

I will call you Shimon, from the Hebrew word for "hear," because God has heard my prayer.

The neighbors exchange horrified glances, my baby's cries blend with their muffled whispers. I bandage his wound and press his mouth to my breast, and he rests in my arms calmly and quietly. Behind me, like a swarm of bees, I can hear the buzz of their words: Abandoned. Deserted. Alone.

I am a chained woman, bound to my husband by marriage but utterly forsaken by him. The years of my abandonment are innumerable and unbearable, but I can summarize them in just a few words:

My name is Rachel, but everyone calls me the abandoned one. I have two children: a healthy, strong daughter and a weak and sickly son, and in order to support them, I wash clothes in the river from sunrise to sunset. My hair is growing back, but instead of my shiny silken tresses my head is now covered with lusterless strands of flax.

The years of my abandonment are innumerable and unbearable. Nothing ever happens to me, whereas his days are full of consequence. I will hear about them someday, mainly from the one they still call Rabbi Elisha, and I will hear about them from Ima Shalom. The rest I will figure out myself. I see the visions and I hear the voices as if it all unfolds before my eyes.

The years of my abandonment are innumerable and unbearable. Day after day, week after week, year after year. Each day resembles the previous one. What news can there be in the life of an abandoned woman?

But the story is not over.

This is not the story of Rachel; this is the story of Akiva.

I am alive for the sake of this story.

I have lived to tell this tale. ■

Yochi Brandes is the author of seven novels and a collection of essays on Biblical women, all bestsellers in Israel. She teaches and lectures widely on the Bible and literature.

Ilana Kurshan works as a translator and editor for a Jerusalem-based literary agency.

HOW NOT TO TRUST

Lessons from Male Relatives

by RACHEL MAIZES

ILLUSTRATION BY HILA PELEG

WHEN I WAS 12, I courted my uncle. Every Friday after school I marched down Waterloo Place past Jamaica Bay, Queens, the stench of rotting seaweed making me long for a real beach, one with pristine sand and washed up treasure. When I got to my uncle's house, I pulled off his polished loafers and his rayon socks, the latter damp and smelling like a decomposing plum I had once discovered at the bottom of my book bag. He lay in his leather recliner and I sank into the shag carpet, pushing my thumbs into the fleshy balls of his feet until he groaned.

My aunt was in the next room, shaking chicken parts in a bag filled with stale breadcrumbs. Occasionally she shouted out encouragement. They had no children of their own.

"Rocks, you're the best," he said, using the nickname he had adopted for me, as he slipped his loafers back on.

I couldn't get that kind of attention at home. I believe my father slept in a pair of black dress shoes, at least I had never seen him without them. He would sit in his high-backed chair, grey suit buttoned, the watery remains of his scotch sweating on the tablecloth, his head lost in a book, *The Story of Civilization*, by Will and Ariel Durant, or the Torah, by God. Eleven fat volumes, the Durant kept him from discovering that my three sisters and I were becoming women, our breasts inflating like the challah our mother baked every Friday, our faces erupting in flame-like boils. When I couldn't stand his silence any longer, I did somersaults, juggled oranges, and read elaborate poems I had written. Once, he looked up, and I waited for him to compliment my artistry.

"More ice," he said, holding out his glass.

He disappeared for weeks, sometimes months at a time. Even my mother didn't know where he went. She was so trusting of him she never asked, and so under his spell she hypothesized he had secluded himself to engage in study and meditation. Other times she claimed he was in Albany on business. We believed her for a while. But then questions arose. If he was in a hotel in Albany, why couldn't we call him? If he was traveling, why hadn't he taken his suitcase? I wondered if I had done something to make him go and I resolved to be perfect when he came back.

I always knew, though, where to find my aunt and uncle. My aunt had a crooked back and I'd press on her hump as if I could pull off a miracle, melting it back into her spine. "That's it, Rocky. Higher. Higher. To the right. Lower. Lower. That's it! That's it!" I worried that the neighbors would hear her screams and call the police.

In addition to manipulating their flesh, I vacuumed and mopped their house for three dollars a week. They threw in a Hershey bar and a Coke. The going rate for housecleaning in 1974 was a lot higher, but the joke was on them. I would have done it for the Hershey bar.

When he was home, my father occasionally met in the evening with the men of our extended family to study Torah. He was an ordained rabbi, although one without a congregation. I begged to be included. No women were allowed, but they humored me, because I was not yet fully a woman. I perched on a footstool, shivering in my pajamas, hopping up now and then to help my mother. With other men in the house, my father was animated, shouting in Yiddish, his hands fluttering like bats at dusk. I served *rugelach* and black tea with lumps of sugar. I developed a crick in my neck, turning from my uncle to my father. My cheeks

ached from smiling. When my uncle rose to leave, I embraced him in a bear hug, lifting up on my toes. But I miscalculated. Barely dressed, I felt shame as my breasts flopped beneath my pajama top and rubbed against his chest.

I sometimes wondered if my father would have preferred male children who could lead the prayers in the synagogue and who as infants would have shared in the covenant of Abraham, their foreskin cut at a celebration where whitefish salad was served. For years, I prayed every night to wake up the next morning a boy. At age 12, I managed to get hand-me-downs from a boy cousin and stuffed my hips and bottom into the narrow jeans, telling myself that breathing was overrated. I started peeing standing up, through a funnel I had found in the kitchen. I cut my hair in a bob. I did all this to win my father's affection, but when I presented myself in my new costume, the effect wasn't what I had hoped for.

"Halloween isn't until next month," he said, pouring himself a scotch.

He would disappear into my parents' bedroom. The room was crowded with a giant oak desk that nobody used. A large air conditioner dripped dirty water on the carpet. Two single beds had been pushed together to pass for a double. They were covered with bedspreads made from material discovered by NASA, stuff that was incapable of wrinkling.

One Saturday, I pressed my ear against the hollow bedroom door and was surprised to hear the voice of a radio announcer, tinny and upbeat. I told myself I was mistaken. As Orthodox Jews, we didn't listen to the radio on the Sabbath. Eavesdropping on another Saturday, I heard my father talking on the phone. The telephone was forbidden on the Sabbath as well. He had stopped attending synagogue. My mother intimated that he was too devout for our neighborhood temple. But over time I realized that although he pretended to observe the commandments, behind our backs he did as he pleased.

I awoke one Sunday in the predawn hours when I heard him leaving. I wrapped myself around his thigh as he descended the concrete stoop to the sidewalk. He asked me to fetch the Durant. I was thrilled to be useful, but by the time I gathered all 11 volumes he was gone.

Not long after, on a Friday night, our family gathered at my grandparents' home. After we blessed the Lord and ate brisket, my uncle led me upstairs to a dark room. He asked me to rub his back and he lay on his stomach, sinking into a cheap cotton bedspread that smelled like Keri Lotion. I sat on the edge of the bed, yanking at loose threads, unraveling the cover's paisley design. I was afraid in the dark, but not as I had been as a child, when bedspreads turned into sharks and ogres. I sensed something ominous, but never having encountered it before, I didn't immediately recognize what it was. I bent over and kneaded my uncle's shoulder blades and pressed my thumbs into the muscles that ran along his spine. He sank deeper into the bed and moaned.

After a while he sat up and slid close to me, his musk aftershave crop-dusting my lungs. He rubbed my neck, his fingers chapped and damp. "Relax," he said. I was too scared to move. He stroked my hair and caressed it between his fingers and thumb. Like a blow-up doll I had seen on TV, I remained immobile, a plastic version of myself. "Relax," he said again, as he caressed my head in his hand. I ran from the room.

Downstairs my parents were eating chocolate babka.

"We have to go," I said.

They looked at each other and my father shrugged as if to say, "Where's the pogrom?" but they put their coats on.

We walked to the end of the block. Blazing street lamps wiped out the sky. My insides were scalding. "He was trying to molest me."

"Are you sure?" my father asked. He looked wistfully at his hands, hoping to find a book, I suppose, but they were empty.

"Maybe he was being nice," my mother said.

"Wrong kind of nice."

True to form, my father didn't stand up for me. He never confronted my uncle who continued to come to our house for Torah study and Friday night dinners. It took decades for me to forgive my father's cowardice. The incident taught me, though, that being my father's daughter wasn't the worst thing. My father had never tried to molest me. Faced with his deceptions—his secret life, his early morning exits, his sham religion—I had developed a sense for corruption, an instinct that saved me when my uncle put his hands on me. Having learned not to trust my father, I knew not to trust my uncle when his behavior turned dangerous.

"Are you sure?" my father asked.

"Maybe he was being nice," my mother said.

After that night, I turned away from men and back to boys who gave me gold-plated earrings and took me to amusement parks where we rode roller coasters and I threw up the lunch they had bought me. These boys never forced themselves on me or even once asked for a foot massage.

Yet within a few years, I renewed my search for a father substitute: an older man, preferably uncaring. I slept with most of the candidates who didn't spend the night or call the next day or send flowers. But they weren't rapists. I had developed an instinct for men who preyed on weakness, and I learned to avoid them.

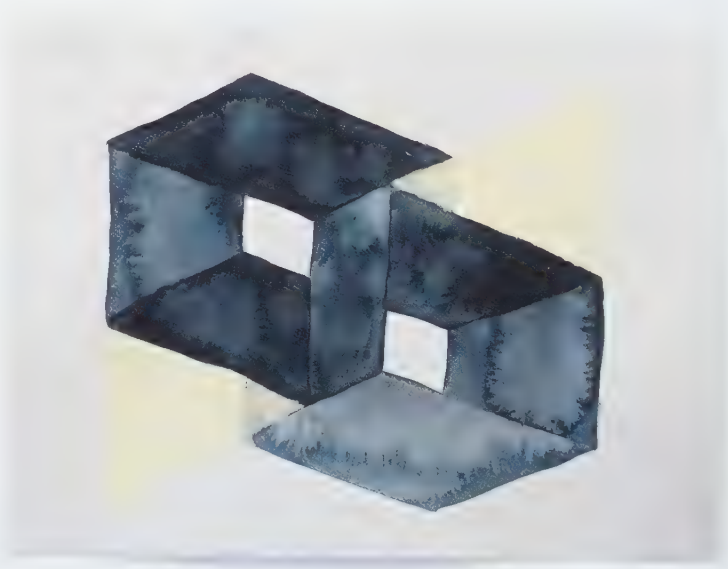
Today when I hear about a woman raped by an uncle or a brother or a cousin, I realize how fortunate I was to escape. I take a moment to consider: Men aren't always what they seem, and often you have no one but yourself to protect you. Sometimes that's enough. ■

Rachel Maizes is an attorney in Boulder, Colorado. Her fiction has appeared in Slice Magazine, Blackbird, The MacGuffin, The Barcelona Review, and elsewhere.

ALWAYS A DESERT

Wherever I go, it's always a desert.
I'm always thirsty.
I don't know if I have enough in my hump.
It's satiation that I long for.
It's the possibility to stop that I long for.
It's the urge to go somewhere that I'd give up.
I walk on
not knowing if I can stop,
even if an oasis appeared.
Even though I'm certain I'd recognize one.
This walking, it drags me along.
Camels aren't taught to stop, only to keep going.
I'm a camel, not for sure a female, but a general kind of camel.
I can't see my hump,
though I know I have only one.
If I could turn back
would I discover that I actually left? Left something behind?
Wherever I go, it's always a desert.

GILI HAIMOVICH
Translated from the Hebrew by **DARA BARNAT**



LEAH WOLFF, IMPOSSIBLE SHAPE 12B, 2012, WATERCOLOR AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 9 X 12 IN.

"Lilith magazine opens up topics that we'd never otherwise be talking about."

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REVIEWS

Redefining Resistance

In the annals of Holocaust study, resistance has probably been one of the most sensitive topics. In the 1950s, there was already a common mantra: "They went like sheep to the slaughter." A new book by **Nechama Tec**, ***Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror*** (Oxford University Press), adds new and nuanced layers to the discussion.

Tec's best-known book is likely *Defiance*, which became a successful Hollywood movie starring Daniel Craig. Here, in her accessible style, Tec challenges scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim and Raul Hilberg, who believed Jews were entirely compliant and that this compliancy resulted from a 2000-year-old "ghetto mentality." Bettelheim took this critique a step further and even condemned Anne Frank's family for not arming themselves with a gun so that they could shoot those who came to arrest them. He described their hiding place as "a trap without an outlet."

Hannah Arendt thought Bettelheim and Hilberg's thesis ludicrous. Though she also believed Jews had not fought back, she argued that neither had any other group which was oppressed by the Nazis. Therefore, to attribute their response to some sort of historical conditioning was simply wrong. (Strangely, Tec conflates Arendt's views with those of Bettelheim and Hilberg.)

Tec recognizes that relying on the narrowest definition of resistance—armed uprising only—produces a distorted view of Jews' responses. It ignores the fact that it was nearly impossible for Jews, particularly those incarcerated in camps and ghettoes, to obtain arms. It ignores the courage of the children, particularly of those who smuggled food into the ghettoes. They not only helped many people survive, but forced the Germans to use police to try to disrupt this chain. It fails to recognize the defiance of Jews who, risking their lives, created crucial archives documenting life in the ghetto, the resourcefulness of Jews who lived "underground," and the bravery of those who served as couriers, ferrying information among resistance groups. Most of the couriers were women, and, with a few exceptions, their story has not been told. Tec's chapter on the topic begins to rectify the situation. There were the currency smugglers, contraband carriers, and black marketers. There were Jews who, defying Nazi laws, created extensive educational activities in the ghettoes. Janusz Korczak, a noted Polish educator, also engaged in a non-normative form of resistance. Offered refuge outside the ghetto, Korczak refused to abandon the children in his orphanage and, instead, accompanied them to what he knew was certain death. Korczak was criticized after the war for his "passive" response. One could praise him instead for his heroism.

But Tec recognizes, as have other scholars before her, that even while calling for a broader definition of resistance, there is the danger of too broad a definition. If everything became a form of resistance then, in essence, nothing was resistance. She treads a careful path through this thicket in an important addition to the corpus of literature on the Holocaust.

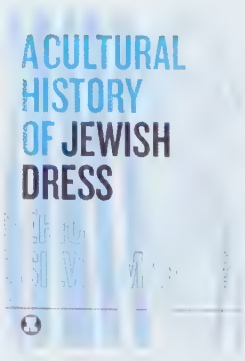
DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT *is Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University. Her most recent book is* The Eichmann Trial.

What Not to Wear

Although he is a cultural anthropologist by training, **Eric Silverman**'s insightful and eminently readable volume, ***A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*** (Bloomsbury), adheres to no single discipline. Instead, he sees Jewish clothing "…as expressive of an open-ended conversation about what it means to be Jewish," and he aims to parse the meanings, both positive and negative, of what Jews have chosen—or at times been forced—to wear.

Silverman begins his inquiry in Biblical times, and claims that the articles and details of ancient clothing—including shoes, veils, fringes, amulets—were metaphoric of certain "key values and conflicts in the Israelite world view." From there, he moves on to dress regulations in classic rabbinic texts and shows how these regulations created a defensive barrier against the Gentile world, protecting Jews from the "profanities and pollutions of the non-Jewish societies in which they dwelled."

Next is the "long and shameful history of restrictive dress codes imposed by the church and European royalty," culminating in the hateful yellow star of the Nazi period. But Silverman also shows how this tradition, though honed in Europe, did not originate there; he finds evidence of Jewish "besmirching" in the hats, badges and other garments required of Jews living in Islamic cultures.



Silverman then segues into the modern era, demonstrating how the often bitter struggle between assimilation and tradition played out through dress, a process that he claims was, "perhaps the most consequential transition for Jewish identity…over the past millennium."

The chapter on the rabbinic concept of *tzniut*, modesty, addresses familiar issues such as necklines, hemlines, color, sleeves and wigs, but it also brings new elements to the table, like a conference of ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Jerusalem who met to tackle a terrifying new fashion crisis—Spandex—and the ways in which contemporary dolls are used to reflect, reinforce, and normalize the sartorial rules of modesty.

This impressive survey is satisfying and meaty, and the many photographs, including several of the author's own family, add an appealing visual counterpoint to his fluid commentary. In analyzing a formal portrait of an immigrant family (which includes his grandmother), he points to the middle class trappings of the sitters: faux parlor setting, good posture, clean clothes, fashionable hairstyles. Nothing in the photo speaks specifically to a Jewish identity—no prayer shawls or head coverings. Yet the modesty of the high, buttoned up necklines, long sleeves and muted embellishments are consistent with Jewish norms and values. These people, "sad, proud, guarded," dress between "two worlds, Old and New, Jewish and secular. They dress for passages, real and metaphoric."

As the book unfolds, Silverman turns his careful eye toward the most traditional of accoutrements, like *teffilin*, *tallit* and *yarmulkes* but he also takes a look at the dress codes of the "New Jews," with their ironic T-shirts, boxer shorts and thongs. These self-styled hipster Jews riff on tradition in ways that can be surprising and transgressive, like the T-shirt printed with the words *Get Laid* next to a pair of teffilin. As Silverman points out, this design, "presumes knowledge of the very Orthodoxy it offends, for only someone familiar with traditional Judaism would know…that one 'lays' teffilin." It is precisely this kind of nuanced observation that makes this book such a deep and thought-provoking pleasure to read.

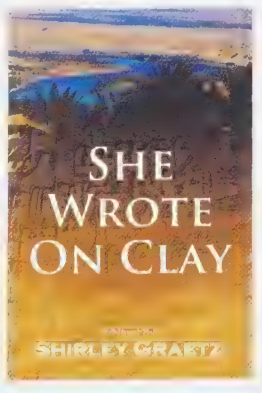
YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH *is Lilith's fiction editor. Her most recent novel is* Two of a Kind.

In Hammurabi's Time

Ironically, when ancient people are expanded from the sparse evidence of their former existence into characters of modern fiction, they tend to become larger-than-life everywomen representing the full sweep of forgotten history. But in ***She Wrote on Clay*** (Hadley Rille Books), **Shirley Graetz** presents a right-sized portrait of a young woman driven to follow a long-forgotten path towards independence in the time of Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE, contemporaneous with Genesis and Exodus).

The *naditu* were an elite class in Babylonian society, free women who could own property and earn significant wealth.

The forgotten world recreated here defies all expectations of the options available to women in a time when society agreed that women needed protection. Graetz, a scholar of the ancient Near East, introduces the fascinating world of the *gagû* (cloister), where our heroine, Iltani, is initiated as a *naditu* ("barren" temple servant). The daughter of a scribe, she longs to follow in her father's footsteps—and amazingly, becoming a naditu is an acceptable, even prestigious, way for her to do so with her family's encouragement. These naditu were an elite class in Babylonian society, comprised of free women who could own property, earn significant wealth, and in general "use whatever talents they [possessed] to enrich their lives." Iltani's advancement came through learning how to read and write cuneiform on clay tablets from an older naditu scribe. Though the gagû felt like a prison to those initiates who had wanted to marry and bear children, to Iltani the walls of the gagû "betoken pride, security, rank, and privilege." *She Wrote on Clay* traces the obstacles Iltani must overcome in her training, which turn out to be significant—though entirely unrelated to the patriarchal gender norms of the time.



The significance of Iltani's rank emerges both in contrast to other women she encounters who sell themselves into service, feud with their brothers over family inheritances, and suffer physical and sexual abuse, as well as from the sea of minor characters wholly dependent on the services of her kind, such as a tanner who cannot enter the city until his slate is read to the soldiers, a seamstress who needs her petition against a non-paying customer recorded, even a fellow naditu who cannot read to herself for pleasure. Graetz's rendering of Iltani's world is fully realized at every level—family, religion, business, courts, law, trade, and especially literature. She brings her sources to life, producing as genuine a reflection of the earliest recorded history as a reader can get outside of

academic sources.

With her eye for period detail and her sensitivity in dramatizing an ancient society, Graetz has produced a novel that satisfies both as history and as fiction.

TAMMY A. HEPPS *is the founder of Treelines.com, a website for writing and sharing family stories.*

Fair and Fowl: Reading the Talmud through Feminist Eyes

A few days ago I was learning *daf yomi*, the daily Talmud page, while nursing my daughter when I came upon the following Talmudic passage, which begins with a quote from the Song of Songs:

"'Our little sister has no breasts.' Rabbi Yohanan said: This refers to Eilam, who merited to learn but not to teach" (Pesachim 87a).

My infant daughter was lying bare-skinned against my breast, and I looked down at her as I puzzled over this passage. Why is having no breasts analogous to learning but not teaching? And then suddenly it dawned on me: I was breastfed as a child and I in turn went on to breastfeed my daughter. But my little daughter, who has no breasts (yet), can eat but cannot feed others. She is therefore like someone who learns (or imbibes) but cannot teach (or nurse) others. To my surprise, when I scanned the margins of my Talmud for this explanation, it was nowhere to be found in Rashi, Tosafot, or any of the traditional commentators. Was it the experience of learning while nursing—surely unfamiliar to any traditional (male) commentator—that led me to this insight? What else might we find in the Talmud when we read it through women's eyes? This brings me to the subject at hand: ***A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud***, a multi-volume series by leading scholars from around the world.

The *Feminist Commentary* series is the brainchild of Israeli-born historian and Talmudist Tal Ilan, who currently teaches at the Free University in Berlin. Each volume is dedicated to a feminist reading of one tractate (or a few consecutive tractates) of the Talmud; the first volume, on *Taanit*, was reviewed in Lilith shortly after its 2008 publication. The most recent volume, published this year, covers *Tamid*, *Middot*, and *Qinnim*, the final three tractates of the order of *Qodshim*, which deal with sacrificial offerings in the Temple. This volume is written by Dalia Marx, an Israeli-born Reform rabbi and liturgist who teaches at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. Marx considers each of these three tractates in turn, shedding light on gender issues and reading the text—which was composed by men 1500 years ago, and studied almost exclusively by men since then—through a woman's eyes.

Marx takes us with her on a "literary pilgrimage" to the Temple, which she argues is the purpose of tractates Tamid and Middot. Middot deals with the dimensions of the Temple; Tamid deals with the daily activity within it. As Marx argues, not everyone merited to visit the Temple when it was standing, and it was only the High Priest who was permitted to penetrate the innermost sanctum. But these tractates made the interior of the Temple accessible to those barred from the priestly cult. Ironically, however, this was not true of women, who were historically excluded from the study house yet granted access to the Temple. Indeed, as Marx shows, women were allowed and encouraged to enter the Temple's courts, and at certain times in life—after giving birth, or following an abnormal genital discharge, for instance—they were obligated to enter and bring a sacrifice. Marx offers a close analysis of those Temple structures that were named for or that invoke women, such as the Women's Court, which, scholars have historically contended, marked the place beyond which women could not enter. But as Marx argues, citing the existence of a Women's Gate leading from the Women's Court into the Inner Court, "It is unlikely that a gate would bear this name if women were not supposed to go through it." Her analysis is informed by theoretical scholarship on the relationship between space and gendering, which she invokes to support her claim that the Temple, like a synagogue or schoolyard or any space, is not just a representation of power relations; it also organizes and perpetuates them.

Was it the experience of learning while nursing—surely unfamiliar to any traditional (male) commentator—that led me to this insight?

In one of her most fascinating and illuminating feminist commentaries, Marx surveys the sexual imagery invoked by the rabbis to describe the Temple's rituals and structures. She shows how the priest's activity in the Temple is described in phallic terms: He penetrates the inner sanctum, fertilizes it by means of incense that would "rise up straight like a stick" (Yoma 53a, Marx's translation) and then fill the house with smoke. And she highlights the erotic nature of the Temple's chambers and vessels, from the cherubs intertwined with one another to the staves of the curtain that could be seen through the curtain, where they "pressed forth and protruded as the two breasts of a woman" (Yoma 54a, Marx's translation). "Could it be," Marx concludes speculatively, "that at least in some rabbis' imagination, coming into contact with the Temple allowed for union with the Divine, in ways that may resemble the union with their wives?" Why the interrogative? One can only wish Marx were bold enough to make this claim less hesitantly, especially considering that it was nearly two decades ago that Bonna Devora Haberman published her groundbreaking article entitled "The Yom Kippur Avoda Within the Female Enclosure" in which she boldly drew back the veil that had long concealed the rabbis' striking sexual imagery, exposing the Temple's most sacred vessels to the brilliant light of her feminist re-reading.

LOVE, DUTY AND VIOLENCE

Rape in Satmar Brooklyn

A young Satmar woman from Williamsburg stands in a Brooklyn courtroom. Rayna (not her real name) faces her abuser and speaks what so many survivors cannot voice. "He watched me when I was young. He waited for me and said he knew I was going to come to him and he couldn't wait for the day." She says her abuser, Nechemya Weberman, had a predatory plan that had been in place since her sheltered childhood.

Allison Yarrow's gripping e-book, ***The Devil of Williamsburg*** (Amazon), presents an important work of investigative journalism, based on intensive reporting of Weberman's 2013 trial.

Yarrow's depiction of hipster-strewn Williamsburg spotlights the stringent traditions of the Satmar community. "In Satmar Williamsburg, there is no president, no Internet. Just God. Religious laws govern life. All of it." The rules are clear and the consequences dire: "Good, obedient girls did well and made strong matches. Wayward girls were lost—to the community, and to God."

In 2007, at the age of 12, Rayna was caught texting and talking on a phone with her first male crush. She was sent to counseling with Nechemya Weberman by her parents and her yeshiva, "who would later threaten to end her education if she refused appointments with Weberman." Weberman was viewed as a "revered leader and a counselor of wayward youth."

At the end of a two-week trial, Weberman was found guilty of 59 counts of child sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. He was sentenced to 103 years in prison.

Yarrow's work points out that "Children like Rayna who buck, question, and disobey religious strictures are relegated to attend costly 'spiritual therapy' with esteemed community men who are not licensed therapists or even life coaches."

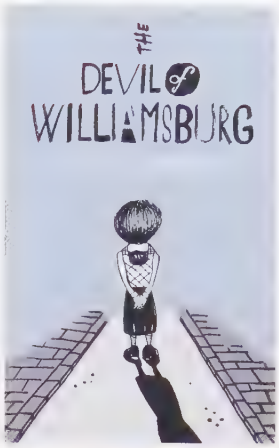
Four years and hundreds of rapes at the hands of Weberman later, Rayna reached the heartbreaking conclusion that the "outcome of abuse is in a way far worse than murder. With murder, the person is dead and it is final. By abuse the victim experiences death over and over, again and again."

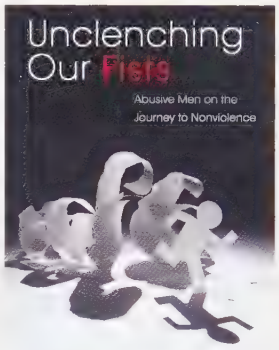
Yarrow does not simplify these heinous crimes. While right and wrong are clear, crimes of sexual abuse are complex and multilayered, with coercive ideologies that the victims often believe to be truth. Yarrow describes how Weberman used Jewish teachings to delude Rayna and justify his behaviors: "A scholar of Jewish mysticism, Weberman told her they had been *beshert*, soul mates, in a previous life, and that fate had orchestrated their reunion."

As Rayna reaches a turning point, she decides to speak out in a court of law, no matter the consequences to herself and her family. This is no small feat, considering the typical response to sexual abuse in the Satmar community. "Special committees mediate disputes among adherents—from debts owed to sex-abuse accusations…Victims who try to pursue justice outside the community are stymied, then shunned."

The Satmar community decries Rayna's decision to speak out. Weberman's wife "still believes her husband fostered these girls out of duty and love, reorienting them to the Satmar way, and ultimately saving their lives," though Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes described the Weberman case as "some of the worst victim intimidation he had ever seen in his near quarter-century in office." The culmination of the victim-bashing is not merely the threats to Rayna's family, her father's loss of business, and nieces' removal from their schools, but that the Satmar Rebbe, Aaron Teitelbaum, says in a speech to thousands, "A Jewish daughter has descended so low, terrible!"

Despite the threats and intimidation, Rayna continued onward in her testimonies. At the end of a two-week trial, Weberman was found guilty of 59 counts of child sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child, ending with a 103-year sentence. This conviction, setting a precedent as the heftiest given in the Satmar community for such a crime, seems to set an example for what Hynes called, "a communal wakeup call."





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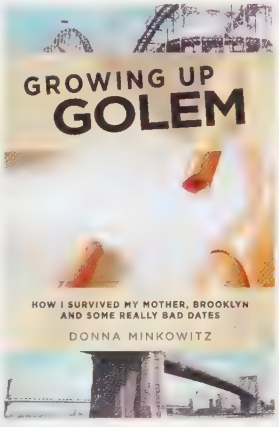

In the end, though, Yarrow appears to hold hope for Rayna—as a young woman who can never forget the acts of abuse in her mind, and yet is a brave, resilient and recently-married female, who very much has a future ahead of her. In Yarrow's last image, she describes a beach date between Rayna and her husband, depicting a new world that still holds tradition dear. "Together they tumble, straight into the water, with all their clothes on."

Yarrow's essay lets loose the devastating, convoluted emotions that sexual abuse engenders, leaving the reader not with tidy conclusions, but rather with a picture of a young woman—just a girl at the time her abuse began—who is able to move forward with both pain and courage.

ILANA KRAMER *is a writer and clinical psychologist who specializes in trauma.*

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is a scourge that crosses all socio-economic, cultural and racial boundaries. It is both ubiquitous and invisible. Its insidiousness is due, in part, to the secrecy that surrounds it. A woman* in an abusive relationship often remains silent, out of fear of repercussion at the hands of her abuser should she speak out; complex reasons such as shame, a misplaced belief that she is somehow to blame for the violence, that she should have known better than to choose this particular partner, a sense that she should have listened to her friends or family who warned her away; or the belief or reality that she needs to maintain her relationship for emotional, economic, or other reasons. The vast majority of abusers, of course, also go to great trouble to hide the pain they perpetrate and are often in denial about their behavior. The silence surrounding abuse makes the violence all the more difficult to address, in part because both abusers and survivors feel isolated and alone. The silence, then, becomes self-perpetuating—people in abusive relationships don't talk because they believe they are alone, and they believe they are alone because abuse is not talked about.

In ***Unclenching Our Fists: Abusive Men on the Journey to Nonviolence*** (Vanderbilt University Press), **Sara Elinoff Acker** peels back some of this secrecy, featuring the first-hand stories of 11 men who are on the long road toward leading abuse-free lives. Acker's access is remarkable in that 8 of the 11 men consented to using their full, real names, and 10 of the 11 consented to having their photos included. This in itself is immeasurably important in breaking the code of silence.

Acker has been involved in anti-domestic-violence efforts since 1985. She started working on intervention programs with men in 1992, when she realized that a critical component of mitigating abuse was to address the source of the problem, the abusive men. She has written this book in the hopes that the stories of these men who have become non-violent or are working toward non-violence will inspire other men to embark on the same journey.

Acker has wisely and intentionally chosen to include men in the book from a diverse range of backgrounds, and included stories of physical, economic and psychological abuse. These diverse representations enable abusers to find their reflections in these stories. This diversity is also important for women looking to recognize their own situations represented—both to give them hope that their partners might change and to help break some of the shame. Women who are educated professionals married to similarly positioned men may appreciate the inclusion of a surgeon, a professor, a filmmaker and an engineer. They might also find resonance in one man's story that includes the observation that "the fundamentalist church, in my opinion, just gives abusive men a place to hide." At the same time, I am disappointed that there isn't one Jewish man (at least no one obviously Jewish) included in this book. There is a strong and persistent myth across the spectrum of Jewish communities (and outside the Jewish community as well) that Jewish men are not abusive. This gives abusive Jewish men cover, and horribly reinforces for their partners a particularly deep sense of shame and isolation.

The road to nonviolence is complicated. She hopes abusive men will begin the journey.

While Acker hopes that this book will inspire men to try to change, she also is careful not to paint a picture of false hope for either men or women. The men's stories are accompanied by a chapter outlining in detail the very long and complicated road to nonviolence. Acker is transparent with her readers: most men enroll in batterer programs because they are mandated to by the courts, not because they have admitted that they have a problem or because they are looking to change. Of those who do enroll, only a small percentage become non-violent; even the men in this book, who have come so far, do not see themselves as "cured"– they all articulate that they must remain vigilant about backsliding. And Acker is careful to give abusive men no empathy. For example, while all of the 11 men here were abused themselves as children or witnessed their fathers abusing their mothers, she nonetheless holds them fully responsible for their

It is important to acknowledge that intimate partner abuse is a problem in same-sex relationships (at about the same rate as it is in heterosexual relationships), and there are women who perpetrate abuse against their male partners. However, according to the Department of Justice, the majority of victims are women abused by male partners, and those relationships are the focus of this book and therefore of this review.

behavior, emphasizing that abuse is always a choice, and the abuser is *always* responsible.

The book also includes a chapter in which survivors (not the partners of these men) and domestic violence professionals respond to the men's stories. The women are skeptical, not only about the possibility of change, but about the sincerity of the men in the book. It seems likely that some of the survivors respond with skepticism because of their own experiences, rather than as a reaction to these men in particular. But either way, it feels refreshing, honest and responsible toward survivors that the author leaves the door open for questioning the fundamental premise.

Acker makes clear that her book is not a self-help manual. The stories of the men, the outlines of the steps toward nonviolence—these are roadmaps for men looking to change and for women to follow to see whether their abusers really are changing. True change can only come with long-term commitment and with the help of a program. However, this book makes a fine first step for both men and women looking for inspiration or hope, without unrealistically raising expectations. The book is also an excellent resource for anyone wishing to understand more clearly the mind of an abuser, or to help a friend on either side of an abusive relationship.

ELIZABETH MANDEL *is a writer living in New York.*

Inhuman But Still Humane

Growing Up Golem: How I Survived My Mother, Brooklyn and Some Really Bad Dates (Magnus Books) joins the collection of memoirs about difficult childhoods, a genre that is becoming at times predictable. **Donna Minkowitz**, however, brings her fierce imagination and compelling prose to *Growing Up Golem*, making it a notable book this year.

The central conceit of *Growing Up Golem* is captivating. Minkowitz presents herself as a golem, created and controlled by her wacky, needy, and sexually abusive mother. Minkowitz explains, "A golem is essentially the Jewish version of a creature called homunculus, which the alchemists of the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages made in their little beakers when they wished to create a small personal servant." In Minkowitz's hands, this conceit plays out with fascinating consequences.

The quest of the book is Minkowitz's transformation from golem to human; she desires, secretly, to be a servant no longer for her mother, her sister, or the women she dates. Through that quest, Minkowitz explores her early life with the requisite wry humor that makes the book highly, even compulsively, readable. What lingers is the emotional complexity that Minkowitz evokes but never quite resolves.

Growing Up Golem shines when Minkowitz explores the fanciful and the mythical in the contemporary world. One of the most delightful extensions of her conceit is her portrayal of Richard Goldstein of the Village Voice as a sea-monster. She writes, "Richard and I had spent hours inside his long, dark, tunnelly, smelly office lair talking about our parents, sex with waterbugs, and what it was like to be a fearsome inhuman minority. Sea-monsters smell a little like reptiles, reader." She spins this fantasy further in ways that are both grotesque and alluring; Minkowitz confides, "I didn't really mind Richard's smell... I would wash Richard's scales with warm sea water as we edited and wrote and talked gay liberation strategy." Minkowitz's relationship with Goldstein, like her relationship with her mother, is both loving and troubling, and she conveys the contours of that duality in a deeply satisfying way.

Sexuality is a central theme of *Growing Up Golem*. Minkowitz's portrayal of her own adult sexuality is graphic and, at time, disturbing. More disturbing, however, is the sexually abusive and manipulative relationship between mother and child. In the limited literary and popular treatments of sexual abuse where women are the perpetrators, Minkowitz's memoir tills new and important ground.

As disturbing as some of her portrayals of sexuality are, so is the way Minkowitz treats people in the memoir. For example, her description of working with interns is wry and sardonic, showcasing her talents as a writer and observer, but it has the bite of truth. In this passage, Minkowitz unwittingly demonstrates the inhuman through her cruelty to others. It is unsettling even as Minkowitz argues it is behavior that necessarily comes from considering oneself a golem.

Minkowitz's early work as a writer for the Village Voice was fiercely political. In 1995, she dressed as a boy to write about the Promise Keepers, an evangelical men's organization that briefly enjoyed wide popularity. Minkowitz's investigations into right wing movements required her to cloak aspects of herself and her identity, which she did with apparent ease. Her essays collected in *Ferocious Romance: What My Encounters With the Right Taught Me About Sex, God, and Fury* (Free Press, 1998) won the Lambda Literary Award.

I remember seeing Donna Minkowitz at The Task Force's Creating Change conferences in the late 1990s. She was at least half a foot shorter than me, petite, slightly older; she seemed everything that I wanted to be: fierce, outspoken, smart, well-read. Her writing challenged many of us as writers and activists to think more and think better. Then, in the early 2000s, Minkowitz began struggling with a repetitive strain injury. Thus, the silence between her award-winning book in 1998 and this memoir. *Growing Up Golem* contains all of the power of her earlier work with its sharp political and social analysis, but it is written without the cloak. *Growing Up Golem* demonstrates Minkowitz's capacity for personal exposure and vulnerability within her own tribe.

JULIE R. ENSZER *is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland. She is the author of* Sisterhood *and* Handmade Love, *and editor of* Milk & Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry.

The final section of the book is devoted to tractate Qinnim, which discusses the laws governing bird offerings. Marx contends that Qinnim is the "most female-centered tractate in the Mishna," since these offerings were most commonly brought by women who had completed their days of purification after giving birth. Although bird sacrifices were also brought by Nazirites and men who had abnormal discharges and other individuals in liminal situations, most of the examples in the tractate apply to women and involve feminine language. The Talmudic rabbis focus their discussion on possible mistakes that may occur when unruly birds fly from one nest to another, mixing up the various nest offerings. Marx shows how the pair of birds required for a nest offering—either two pigeons or two turtledoves, as specified by the Bible—served as a synecdoche for the woman herself, since both birds and women were perceived as uncontrollable and wild in their nature. We might say, summarizing Marx's work on Tamid, Middot, and Qinnim, that women were allowed to enter into the Temple and survey its chambers, but the priests were always worried that the female pilgrims, like their pigeons, would squawk and scatter their feathers and destroy the orderly sanctity of the all-male Temple cult.

On behalf of those of us who study Talmud while brooding over our young, and on behalf of centuries of scholars who were denied the insights afforded by feminist criticism, I can only muse: so fair and fowl and feminist a commentary I have not seen.

ILANA KURSHAN *is Lilith's books editor.*

Excavating Obscenity

Who would have thought that some American Jews at the dawn of this century supported "smutty" literature as a way of entering exclusive cultural circles, rather than getting thrown out? This is just one of the many surprising, strange and fascinating pieces of literary history to be found in **Josh Lambert**'s detailed chronicle of Jews and obscenity in America, ***Unclean Lips: Jews, Obscenity, and American Culture*** (NYU Press). Lambert explains that there was a "speakers' benefit" for a number of Jewish critics, lawyers, and publishers like Horace Liveright who pushed for the right of readers to get their hands on works like *Ulysses*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or *Tropic of Cancer*. This despite the fact that early censors, like the notorious Anthony Comstock, pointedly associated "obscenity" with old anti-Semitic stereotypes. By the 1920s, times, they were-a-changin, and free speech pioneers, says Lambert, were able to buy themselves cultural capital.

This early history is just one of many chapters of literary excavation in *Unclean Lips*. There's a detailed look at the way the Holocaust's legacy influenced sexology, of all things: Nazism rose from repression, the naive theory went, ergo if we all just get it on we can end racism.

Most interesting to feminist readers will be the section on heroine Harriet Pilpel (see excerpt on page 48), whose fight to get abortion and birth control legalized pitted her against those censorious Comstock laws. From Pilpel's story, it's clear that crackdowns on free speech are not merely about regulating smut, but about keeping it in the hands of the powerful, and, in particular, preventing women from accessing materials pertaining to sexuality—and controlling their own reproductive destiny.

Lambert also spends some time with *Crackpot*, a novel by Canadian-Jewish writer Adele Wiseman that revolves around a Jewish prostitute, whose warmth extends to allowing her own son to sleep with her unknowingly. This incestuous act is posited as a gesture of reconciliation, and Lambert classifies it as very much the feminist inversion of a Philip Roth trope.

In our own time, so-called modesty advocates like Wendy Shalit and Shmuley Boteach have sought to impose an Orthodox-Judaism-"lite" version of modesty on the general American public. But, as Lambert points out, even these modern scolds acknowledge that the government can't force people to cover up. In fact, most literature and culture, Jewish and otherwise, stops short of letting it all hang out. *Unclean Lips* explores the idea of literary self-regulation, close-reading several works of Yiddish-American literature, which, despite being ignored by official state censors, often referred to sex in a veiled manner that left the explicit moments to the readers' imagination.

One of the delights of the book is its interest not just in the memorable pinnacles of literary smut by Joyce, Henry Miller, and Roths Philip and Henry, but also lesser-known novels, relegated to their time, such as the 1970s novel about a free-love university, *The Harrad Experiment*. Why have some envelope-pushing works endured in the cultural memory while others have faded? Some of it is due to literary quality, but some may be because of the same forces—misogyny, prudishness, and cultural chauvinism—that spur official censorship.

Unclean Lips avoids generalizing on a cultural or racial level—but Lambert points out that the avoidance of the pernicious stereotype of the "hypersexual Jew" has led to near-erasure of the intertwined history of American Jews' cultural contribution and the discourse over obscene speech. Jews arrived on these shores as members of a far-flung diaspora unused to a central authority telling them what to read. Furthermore, they were an insider-outsider group looking for a way further in. Even today, as Lambert writes, foul-mouthed Jews like Larry David and Sarah Silverman push back against a dominant "family values" Christian culture that seeks to sanitize. All of these specific contexts, and more, explain in part why so many Jews in so many distinct eras had a crucial role to play in getting their American brethren to embrace freer speech.

SARAH SELTZER *is a journalist, essayist and fiction writer.*

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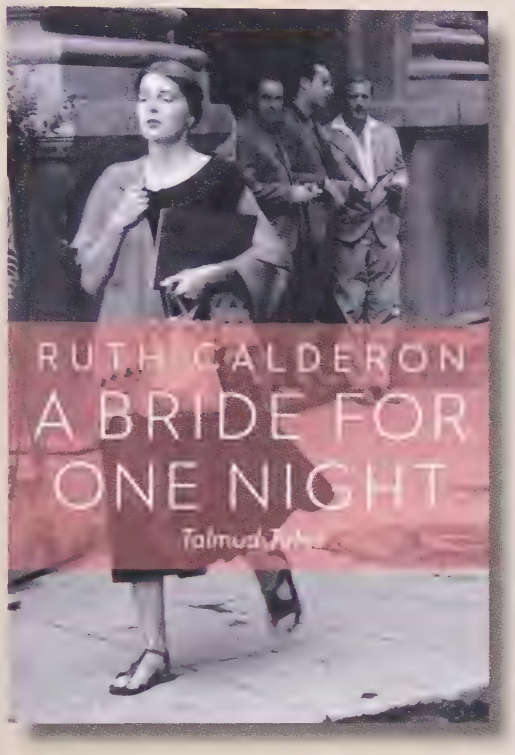

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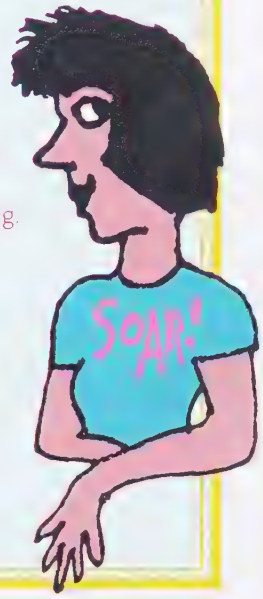

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HAPPENING

Last of the Red Hot Mamas

When Sonya Kalish Tuck, born in Ukraine in 1886, came to New York in 1906 to seek a career in vaudeville, she was considered to be "too fat and ugly." So she belted out Black-influenced music like ragtime, blues and jazz, in blackface. Before long she dropped the disguise, and emerged as "Sophie Tucker: the Last of the Red-Hot Mamas," with a stage career that lasted until her death in 1966. Widely known for her bawdy humor (tame by today's standards) and her big personality, she never lost touch with her Jewish roots. Sophie Tucker's original Decca rendition of "My Yiddishe Momme," recorded in 1928, featured English on one side and Yiddish on the other. She also recorded "My Mother's Sabbath Candles" in English and Yiddish. You can listen to her recording on the website of the Judaica Sound Archives. *http://faujsa.fau.edu/tuckers/index.html*

Can girls now make big bucks?

Stay tuned for the longterm results from the BBYO Michigan Business Entrepreneurship Institute, which brings Jewish teens to the University of Michigan so they can learn about competitive advantage, ownership, opportunity recognition, marketing, finance and product development. Groups of teens present original business plans to a panel of judges from the business community, and the winners get cash prizes to implement their plan. More information at *Bbyo.org*.

"Saffron and Rosewater"

In a kind of Persian Jewish "Vagina Monologues," actors perform the stories of powerful Persian writers Angela Nazarian on a child's view of fleeing Iran, Farideh Golden on a Persian grandmother's rendition of the Purim story as fairy tale, Esther Amini on defying a traditional father by moving into a college dormitory, Dora Lev Mossanen on a wife's consideration of escaping her marriage, and Gina Nihai on a writer making it in America. This original show was developed at the Los Angeles-area Jewish Women's Theatre, best known for pioneering "at-home salon theater" and theme-based collective productions. "Saffron and Rosewater" was performed in November to a full house at the 92Y in NYC, with songs by Niki Black. *Jewishtheater.org*

YEDID

Israel's primary nonprofit organization providing social and legal assistance to low-income citizens is directed by Sari Ravid, a Brooklyn-born Jerusalem social worker, to help meet the needs of Israelis living on Israel's geographic and societal periphery. In 1997 she founded this volunteer-based organization which now has 16 Citizen Rights Centers, and has assisted over a quarter of a million Israelis to break through their cycle of poverty. Ravid writes about social change and Purim as a celebration of the ingenuity of the people as changemakers, symbolized by our holding noisemakers from below—in contrast to Hanukkah's divine rescue, symbolized by our spinning dreidels which we grasp from above. *www.yedid.org.il/?id=4966*

Yiddish Classics into English

Here's a switch! Instead of translating Shakespeare, etc., into Yiddish, Taytsh, the Yiddish Book Center's site for Yiddish-to-

Celebrating this Patron of the Arts

Ayala Zachs (1912–2011) was an ardent collector of modern art, including the works of Israeli artists. A special exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, in Toronto, honors her memory. Zacks, with her husband, donated over 300 works of modern art: Picasso, Modigliani, de Chirico, Chagall, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Matisse and Degas.

Born in Jerusalem as Ayala Ben-Tovim, Zacks studied in London and Paris. During World War II she joined the French Resistance after her first husband enlisted to the army and was killed during a military operation. In 1947, she married Samuel Zacks, a Canadian economist and art collector, and together they also acquired art by Israeli artists like Marcel Janco, Mordechai Ardon, Reuven Rubin and Anna Ticho. Some years after Samuel Zacks died, she returned to Israel, married Zalman Abramov, a lawyer and Knesset member, and was involved in the growth of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Israel Museum. Through May 2014. More at *www.ago.net/a-tribute-to-ayala-zacks-1912-2011*.

PHOTOS: ULTRAVIOLET, THE NATIONAL LIGHT BRIGADES NETWORK AND LADY PARTS JUSTICE

UltraViolet

Get news of campaigns such as Sarah Silverman and Lizz Winstead raising funds in a telethon for Texas women who needs abortions. Or follow a link to make your voice heard by your senator to confirm the appointment to the US. Court of Appeals of pro-woman Judge Nina Pillard. Sign up for e-alerts from this organization dedicated to fighting sexism and expanding women's rights—from politics and government to media and popular culture. *weareultraviolet.org*

Clockwise from left: Lizz Winstead; Ultraviolet and National Light Brigades came out to stand with Texas women against Governor Rick Perry's abortion ban; craft submission by an UltraViolet member.

English translators, wants to help translate the treasures of Yiddish literature into English for a new generation of readers. On their website, you can post your translations-in-progress and invite commentary and annotation from your colleagues around the world, debate the nuances of terms and idioms in interactive lexical databases, recommend your favorite Yiddish literary works to be translated, and plenty more. *http://taytsh.org*

Torah—a feminist perspective

Here's an interactive feminist commentary on the entire Torah! The Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program of the International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW) has created a unique and free Jewish educational resource. Bonna Devora Haberman (above), who co-wrote the course with Zvi Zohar, explains: "Ours is the first generation of Jewish women to have access to the Torah on a mass scale. Using the Internet, we are making Torah study even more accessible than ever, and starting a new conversation among women around the world. Every time we open the text, we bring with us our history, our values, and our questions—ourselves..." Available online in English and Spanish. The project is sponsored in her memory by the Zurich family of Bea Zucker, who was European President of ICJW, which also offers three other online study programs—on Biblical women, Jewish festivals, and women's life cycle events. Materials in Russian and Spanish.
http://icjw.org/gen.aspx?page=Bea-zucker

Donate Books to Prisoners

Books Through Bars (not the kind of bars you think) is a group of volunteers who meet in Brooklyn each week to match the book requests from prisoners with donated books. The books are then mailed directly to the individuals behind bars rather than to prison libraries. The volunteers are activists, librarians, archivists, editors, students, office workers, teachers, authors and other book lovers. Want to join them, or start a similar project? Check out *http://booksthroughbarsnyc.org*.

4,000 Years for Choice

This poster series (below) by graphic artist and activist Heather Ault features abortive herbs, contraceptive devices, and quotations from notable figures. It's intended to replace the iconic wire coat hanger used by the pro-choice movement for decades. "Without knowledge of this history," says Ault, "we as Americans cannot fully understand women's deeply ingrained desire to control pregnancies for the good of ourselves, our relationships, and our families." *4000YearsForchoice.com*

Where to Marry the One You Love

A unique world map, produced by the Israeli nonprofit Hiddush—Freedom of Religion for Israel, compares "freedom of marriage" in countries around the world. It was created to investigate a paradox: that although Israel is a democratic and liberal state, it ranks with some of the most fundamentalist Islamic countries on this issue. This project hopes to change Israel's policy so that it will recognize secular civil marriages and marriages conducted by all religious affiliations. *marriage.hiddush.org*

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Individuals conceived as a result of sperm, egg or embryo donation who are seeking to make mutually desired contact with others with whom they share genetic ties can register with the Donor Sibling Registry. The registry advocates for the right to honesty and transparency for donor kids, and for social acceptance, legal rights and valuing the diversity of all families. *donorsiblingregistry.com*

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HOW HARRIET PILPEL TOOK OBSCENITY OFF THE MAP

by JOSH LAMBERT

WHAT DOES OBSCENITY HAVE TO DO WITH BIRTH CONTROL? Legally, quite a bit. Or at least it did when the landmark modern statute that criminalized both was passed in 1873. That law, usually called the Comstock Act, criminalized mailing any "obscene, lewd, or lascivious book" but also "any article or thing designed or intended for the prevention of conception or producing an abortion." The government acted to reign in both because they were perceived as threats to the power of male, Christian authorities.

The courts would go on to distinguish birth control and abortion from the legal category of obscenity in a 1936 case. The defendant there, hand-picked by Margaret Sanger to represent the birth control movement, was a pioneering Jewish doctor, Hannah Mayer Stone. But the Comstockian association of the two issues would continue to influence activists and artists for decades to come.

Jewish, immigrant, female threats to the power of male, Christian authorities.

There's no clearer example of this than the legal career of Harriet F. Pilpel (1911–1991), a stalwart, lifelong opponent of both prongs of the Comstock Act.

Pilpel graduated second in her class at Columbia Law School in 1936, but the judge who regularly hired Columbia's second-best student told her he refused to employ a female clerk, and most law firms discriminated openly against both women and Jews. Pilpel didn't care, though, because she was already set on practicing at Greenbaum, Wolff, and Ernst, a Jewish firm that had mounted successful defenses against obscenity charges, most famously in the cases of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the birth control advocate Mary Ware Dennett.

Pilpel is mostly remembered now for serving as general counsel to Planned Parenthood during the decades in which contraception and abortion were legalized by the Supreme Court, as well as for her leadership role at the American Civil Liberties Union. She insisted, in 1964, that the ACLU defend women's reproductive rights and the civil liberties of homosexuals, two issues it had until then refused to touch. Less frequently noted have been Pilpel's contributions as a tireless anti-censorship advocate. She presciently argued against movie censorship in the *New York Times* in 1946, and, in 1957, won for the Kinsey Institute the right to import sexually explicit materials for study. She wrote a monthly legal column for *Publisher's Weekly* for decades, and even published alongside Thomas Pynchon and Tillie Olsen in a literary journal.

By the 1970s, some prominent male First Amendment lawyers, like Pilpel's mentor Morris Ernst, and Norman Mailer's cousin Cy Rembar, were worrying about the consequences of their legal victories in the area of obscenity. But Pilpel remained steadfast. In a 1973 lecture, she outlined the recrudescent challenges to free expression imposed by the Burger Court, and argued for a redoubled commitment to First Amendment protections: "There should be as free a marketplace for sexual ideas and descriptions as we have now with reference to other kinds of ideas and descriptions." Speculating on why the court had recently retreated from its more liberal positions of the 1960s, Pilpel noted that "the Court majority consists of middle-aged or elderly gentlemen of the upper middle class ... [who] are not completely comfortable about sex and therefore objectify their subjective concerns" and who display "conventional middle class distaste for the vulgar and profane." "I'm all in favor of good taste," she went on, "but I don't think it should be enshrined as a matter of constitutional law"—precisely because she understood that "taste" so often works to reproduce the privilege of "gentlemen of the upper middle class."

Raised as a Reform Jew, active as an adult in the Ethical Culture Society, and married to an employee of the Joint Distribution Committee, Pilpel, like most lawyers, never seems to have attributed her commitments in the field of obscenity law to her Jewishness. But she emphasized the way that prosecutors use "obscenity charges as a means of suppressing views which are dissident, satirical, irreverent, or merely unpopular"—an argument with particular resonance for American Jews who were self-conscious about their vulnerability as members of a demographic minority. Contraception was also personal, given her commitments to her career and family: "Birth control and the freedom of women to choose whether or not to have children was of burning interest to me," she said, "partly because I always wanted to have a career and children, but if I had no control over when I had the children it wouldn't have been possible for me to plan my career." It may be just a historical accident that the battles begun at the turn of the 20th century by Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger to deliver safe and effective contraception to Jewish immigrant women were fought and largely won, decades later, by a professionally empowered American Jewish woman. But if so, it is an enormously satisfying one. ■

Josh Lambert is the academic director of the Yiddish Book Center and visiting assistant professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is a contributing editor to Tablet magazine, and the author of American Jewish Fiction: A JPS Guide *(2009). This piece is adapted from his new book,* Unclean Lips: Jews, Obscenity, and American Culture *(New York University Press, 2013).*

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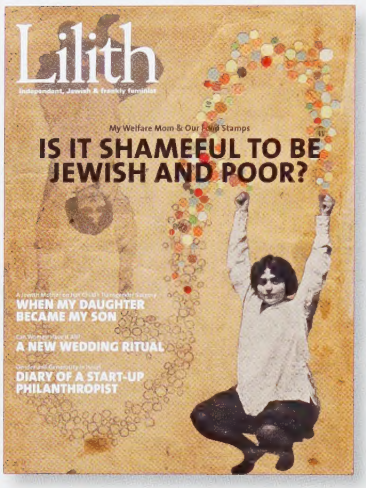
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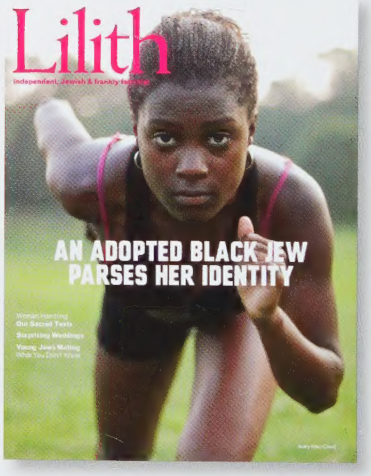

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